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Scottish Birds is the quarterly journal for SOC members, and is published in March, June, September and December annually.

Containing original papers relating to ornithology in Scotland, topical articles, bird observations, reports of rare and scarce bird sightings, alongside branch and Club-related news, our members tell us that *Scottish Birds* is one of the key benefits of belonging to the SOC. Its different sections have been developed to meet the wide needs of the birdwatching community, and the publication is renowned for its first-class photography.

An archive of the journal is available on the SOC website, where links can be found to other Club publications including the *Scottish Bird Report* online.

More about the SOC...

On the one hand, a birdwatching club. Established in 1936, the Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) is Scotland's bird club with 15 branches around the country and a growing membership of over 3,000. Through a programme of talks, outings, conferences and other events, it brings together like-minded individuals with a passion for birds, nature and conservation.

On the other, a network of volunteers across Scotland, gathering vital, impartial information about our wild birds. The data we collect is made available to conservationists, planners and developers, and is used by organisations such as the RSPB, as one of the first points of reference in informed conservation planning.

Club Headquarters can be found at Waterston House, Aberlady, overlooking the scenic local nature reserve. Housed within, is the George Waterston Library, the largest ornithological library in Scotland, and the Donald Watson Gallery - one of the jewels in the Waterston House crown, exhibiting wildlife art all year-round.

Join us...

As well as receiving *Scottish Birds* every quarter, SOC members have access to a programme of talks and outings across Scotland and affiliation to a local branch of the Club. New members will receive a welcome pack on joining, plus a thank you gift if paying their subscription by direct debit.

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Adult (aged 18 and over)	£ 32.00
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For more information about the Club and its activities, including details of how to join, please visit www.the-soc.org.uk or contact Waterston House on 01875 871 330, or email membership@the-soc.org.uk

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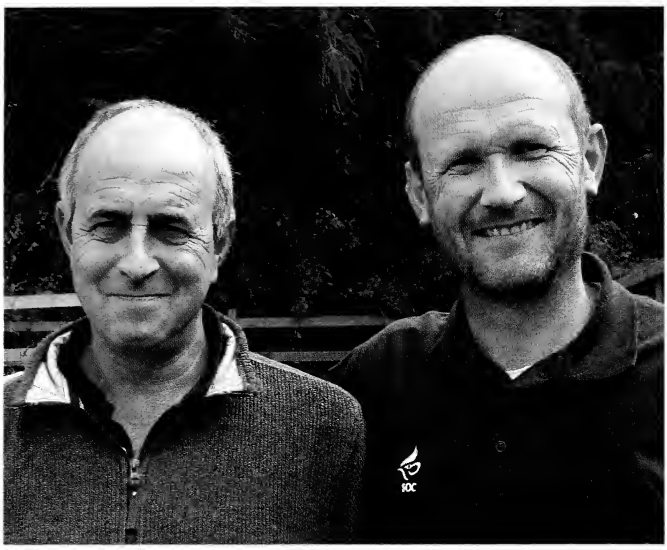

Plate 185. Chris McInerny with Ian Thomson (left), RSPB Loch Leven, Perth & Kinross, June 2015. © *Dave Heeley*

President's Foreword

As I get older, I find that time moves more quickly! As evidence of this truism, I find it incredible that this is my last Foreword for *Scottish Birds* as Club President. I can still vividly remember Chris Waltho phoning me to invite me to join SOC Council, Ken Shaw then asking me to become Vice President and me starting as President just two years ago. And now I am approaching the close of my tenure! Though it has been much work, it has also been much fun and I have particularly enjoyed working with the staff at Waterston House, members of Council and the Management Committee, and meeting and making many new friends through the Club.

I'm also delighted to be handing over to Ian Thomson, the current Vice President, as I am certain Ian will help move the Club in a positive direction. I'd also like to personally thank Jane Cleaver, Alan Fox, Dave Heeley and Wendy Hicks for the hard work they have put in for the Club and the pleasure I have had in working with them.

The Club had a stand at the Scottish Birdfair in May, held at Musselburgh Lagoons, East Lothian and this event was a great success. This autumn's SOC conference will be at the Atholl Palace Hotel in Pitlochry at the end of October. Its title is 'Scotland's upland birds - the impact of land management': a very provoking and topical line-up of speakers has been organised. The 2014/15 Annual Report, enclosed with this issue, includes the agenda for the AGM, which will be held in Pitlochry. We very much hope you will attend these events.

On behalf of Council, I'd like to congratulate Ian Darling on the recent award of an OBE 'For voluntary service to the Conservation of Wild Birds and Land Management in Scotland'. Ian has had a long association with the SOC, and we on Council are delighted that his contribution has been recognised in this way.

We appear to have had an excellent breeding season at my Loch Lomond study sites. Woodland species, such as Redstart, Tree Pipit and Wood Warbler have been common and widespread. Indeed, I find Tree Pipits are now almost abundant, and I have noticed an expansion in range and numbers of Wood Warblers, so much so that I hear the delightful calls and songs of both species in many new places. This is very encouraging after years of apparent decline, but perhaps reflects the northern shift of these species in the UK, as recorded in the recent Atlas.

It has been an honour working for the SOC for the past few years. Thank you very much for your support. Best wishes to all and good birding.

Chris McInerny, SOC President

Plate 186. Northern Long-tailed Tit, Halligarth, Unst, Shetland, November 2013. © *Mike Pennington*

Amendments to The Scottish List: species and subspecies

THE SCOTTISH BIRDS RECORDS COMMITTEE

In 1993, the Council of The Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) delegated to the Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC) responsibility for producing a *Scottish List* and publishing regular amendments. The list was first published in 1994 and SBRC appointed a Subcommittee to maintain it; the current members are Dave Clugston, Ron Forrester, Angus Hogg, Bob McGowan, Chris McInerny and Roger Riddington.

SBRC established several principles for the original version of the *Scottish List*, which are still followed. The British Ornithologists' Union (BOU) has maintained the official *British List* since 1883 and SBRC adopts its taxonomy, sequence, scientific and English names for the *Scottish List*. Similarly, species categorization follows BOU.

The BOU Records Committee (BOURC) normally only adjudicates on the first British record for any taxon. The responsibility then lies with the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC) for acceptance of all subsequent records of rare species and subspecies in Britain. Similarly SBRC are responsible for acceptance of records of species and subspecies which fall outside the remit of BBRC, but which remain rare in a Scottish context. Decisions by BOURC, BBRC and SBRC automatically apply to the *Scottish List*.

The *Scottish List* was most recently published in full in 2011, with updates in 2013 and 2014 (Forrester 2011, 2013, 2014). Since then, there have been several publications that affect the *Scottish List*. BOURC has published its 43rd and 44th Reports (BOU 2015a, b) and the Taxonomic Sub-Committee of BOURC (BOURC-TSC) has published its 10th report (Sangster *et al.* 2015). Also, BBRC has produced the report on rare birds for 2013 (Hudson *et al.* 2014), and SBRC has produced its report for 2013 (McGowan & McInerny 2015).

Pairs of species

Our last paper reported BOURC's split of Orphean Warbler into two species, Western Orphean Warbler *Sylvia hortensis* and Eastern Orphean Warbler *Sylvia crassirostris* (Forrester *et al.* 2014). There was only one Scottish record of Orphean Warbler, at Aberdeen on 10 October 1982 (*British Birds* 77: 552, 107: 621), but as this bird was designated 'subspecies undetermined' it was not possible to assign it to either of the new species, and was removed from the *Scottish List*.

This decision has since been reviewed in conjunction with the similar situation concerning the five Scottish records of *Pterodroma* petrels which could only be assigned to 'either Fea's Petrel or Madeira Petrel'. These appear on the *Scottish List* as Fea's Petrel/Madeira Petrel *Pterodroma feae/madeira* with the paired petrel species appearing in Category A of the *Scottish List* and counting as one in relation to the number of Category A species.

It is possible that future splits could also affect the *Scottish List* in similar ways, and the Subcommittee believes it is necessary to show consistency. BOURC now includes such paired species within the *British List* (BOU 2013), although these do not appear within the systematic list, or within the species totals. Following BOURC's action, the Category A total is now reduced by one, to reflect the removal of 'Fea's or Madeira Petrel'. Both 'Fea's or Madeira Petrel' and 'Western Orphean Warbler or Eastern Orphean Warbler' now appear at the end of the Category A systematic list.

BOURC decisions which affect the *Scottish List*

Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia*

Eastern races 'Eastern Grasshopper Warbler' *L. n. straminea/mongolica*

2012 Fair Isle Observatory, juvenile, 20 September, trapped, photo, DNA analysis (Rosser *et al.* 2013, Miles *et al.* 2015, *British Birds* 107: 623–624).

Four subspecies of Grasshopper Warbler are currently recognized: the 'western' subspecies *L. n. naevia* and *L. n. obscurior* and the 'eastern' *L. n. straminea* and *L. n. mongolica*. This individual could not be determined to race, but was accepted by BOURC as belonging to one of the two 'eastern' subspecies (BOU 2015a). 1st Scottish record. Add subspecies pair *straminea/mongolica* to the *Scottish List* with status code V.

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

East Asian races 'Eastern Yellow Wagtail' *M. f. plexa/tschutschensis/simillima*

Following a review by BOURC the subspecies *simillima* was removed from the *Scottish List* (Forrester 2013). The bird recorded on Fair Isle on 9 October 1909 was considered by BOU to be of eastern origin, but could not be assigned to subspecific level. The 8th BOU Checklist (BOU 2013) now shows this one confirmed record of an eastern subspecies, as probably *plexa*, *tschutschensis* or *simillima*. On the basis of the 1909 record add the eastern subspecies grouping *plexa/tschutschensis/simillima* to the *Scottish List* with status code V.

[There has since been a record at Bruray, Out Skerries, Shetland on 10–14 October 2011 accepted by BBRC (*British Birds* 107: 638), as belonging to *plexa*, *tschutschensis*, *simillima*, *taivana* or *macronyx*.]

BOURC Taxonomic Sub-committee decisions which affect the *Scottish List*

Recommendations in the BOURC Taxonomic Sub-committee 10th Report (*Ibis* 157: 193–200) are followed.

Taxonomic sequence of larks

Species appearing on the *Scottish List* are listed in the following sequence:

Woodlark	*Lullula arborea*
Skylark	*Alauda arvensis*
Crested Lark	*Galerida cristata*
Shore Lark	*Eremophila alpestris*
Short-toed Lark	*Calandrella brachydactyla*
Bimaculated Lark	*Melanocorypha bimaculata*
Calandra Lark	*Melanocorypha calandra*

Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans*

The correct name for Moltoni's Warbler is *Sylvia subalpina* not S. *moltonii*, and it is recognised as a species separated from Subalpine Warbler *S. cantillans* (BOU 2015b). It breeds in Mallorca, Corsica, Sardinia and Ligurian Apennines, Italy (wintering area unknown) and has occurred in Scotland (Forrester 2014). **Add Moltoni's Warbler to Category A.** Status code V. Monotypic. Place between Subalpine Warbler and Sardinian Warbler. There are now three accepted records, the first on St Kilda on 13 June 1894.

Taxonomic sequence of Prunellidae (Dunnock and other accentors)

Species appearing on the *Scottish List* are listed in the following sequence:

Alpine Accentor	*Prunella collaris*
Dunnock	*Prunella modularis*

BBRC decisions which affect the *Scottish List*

Pacific Diver *Gavia pacifica*

2013 Shetland Grutness Voe, Mainland, adult, 16 May, photo (Harvey & Riddington 2013, *British Birds* 106: plate 253: 107: 588, plate 107).

1st Scottish record. Status code V. Monotypic. Place between Black-throated Diver and Great Northern Diver. Add to Category A.

Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*

North American race, 'Northern Harrier' *C. c. hudsonius*

2008 Orkney North Ronaldsay, 24 September to 3 October, photo (*British Birds* 107: 594).

1st Scottish record of this subspecies. Status code V. Add *C. c. hudsonius* to *Scottish List.*

Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*

West Mediterranean island race, 'Balearic Woodchat Shrike' *L. s. badius*

2013 Orkney Pierowall, Westray, male, 26 May, photo; presumed same, **Shetland** Ham, Foula, male, 28 May, photo (Wynn 2013, *British Birds* 107: 617, plate 307).

1st Scottish record of this subspecies. Status code V. Add *L. s. badius* to *Scottish List.*

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*

Northern race, 'Northern Long-tailed Tit' *A. c. caudatus*

2013 Shetland Halligarth, Unst, five, 3 November, three remaining to 4th, photo (*British Birds* 107: 618).

Although there have been several previous claims, this is the 1st Scottish record of this subspecies to be accepted. Status code V. Add *A. c. caudatus* to the *Scottish List.*

Scottish List category totals

As a result of the above changes the *Scottish List*, category totals are now:

Category A	509
Category B	6
Category C	8
Total	523
Category D	10

Records of species and subspecies recorded in Scotland on up to 20 occasions

Comprehensive lists of all records of species and subspecies recorded in Scotland on up to 20 occasions now appear on the SOC's website in tabulated form (www.the-soc.org.uk/up-to-20-occasions). The lists are updated annually.

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Revised ms accepted July 2015

Plate 187. Tree Sparrow breeding in a former House Martin nest, Whitekirk church tower, Lothian, 24 June–29 July 2007. © *Stephen Welch*

Nest sites of House Sparrows and Tree Sparrows in South-east Scotland

H.E.M. DOTT

In Britain, most House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* traditionally nest in crevices in buildings and most Tree Sparrows *Passer montanus* in holes in trees, crevices in buildings and nest boxes (Summers-Smith 1963, 1988, 1995, Cramp & Perrins 1994). However, the incidence of sparrows nesting in less usual sites is not well known.

Fieldwork for the latest Bird Atlas for Britain and Ireland (Balmer *et al.* 2013) and for a regional atlas for South-east Scotland currently in preparation, required visits to all the 2x2 km squares (tetrads) in the whole of Lothian and Borders (here termed South-east Scotland) over the summers of 2008–13. This fieldwork provided an opportunity to find out what types of nest sites were seen for House Sparrows and Tree Sparrows. A questionnaire was sent after the 2008–13 period to all atlas fieldworkers in South-east Scotland who had submitted any records of *confirmed* breeding (occupied nest, or nest with eggs or young) or of *probable* breeding (nest building or entering probable nest site), for either species of sparrow. The questionnaire asked whether observers had seen evidence of nesting in buildings, walls, nest boxes, holes in trees, constructed in branches of trees or shrubs, in hedges, or in climbing plants for both species of sparrow. They were also asked to mention other information if possible, such as types of trees or plants or whether evergreen or deciduous.

From 109 questionnaires emailed, 40 replies were received, and the information obtained is displayed in Table 1. I asked for any observations of sparrows' nests during 2008–13 whether made during atlas fieldwork or not, and Table 1 includes all information received.

Many replies noted House or Tree Sparrows nesting in nest boxes apparently on buildings or structures in the reporters' own or nearby gardens, so there may be a bias towards observations at houses, gardens and farms. Similarly, nests in buildings or nest-boxes would be more easily detected than those in holes in trees, particularly if these were in woods or shelter belts, and so tree hole nesting may be under-recorded relative to nesting around human habitations.

Table 1. Reports of House Sparrow and Tree Sparrow nests from atlas fieldworkers in South-east Scotland for 2008–2013. Number of replies = 40. (Names: Rook *Corvus frugilegus*, House Martin *Delichon urbicum*, Swallow *Hirundo rustica*, Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*, Great Tit *Parus major*).

	House Sparrow		Tree Sparrow	
	no. of reports	no. of nests	no. of reports	no. of nests
In buildings, walls or roofs	40	100+	12	>64
In nest boxes	7	>21	14	>44
In holes in trees	0	0	7	>58
In branches of trees	0	0	0	0
In hedges	1	>1	4	6
In climbing plants	2	3–4	1	2–3
In Rook nest	0	0	1	1
In House Martin nest	4	>4	2	2
In Swallow nest	1	1	0	0
Usurping nest box from Blue Tit	0	0	1	1
Evicted from nest box by Great Tit	0	0	1	1

House Sparrow

The responses contained no record of a nest constructed in tree branches. One person reported "some" nests in a cypress *Cupressaceae* hedge, and two people saw nests in climbing plants on houses; one in Jasmine *Jasminum* and one in Ivy *Hedera helix*. Nest boxes were used, though to only half the extent than by Tree Sparrows. An earlier Scotland-wide enquiry, sent to all Scottish Local Recorders and placed in *Scottish Bird News* in 2004, makes interesting comparisons. The Scotland-wide enquiry revealed House Sparrow nests in tree branches, hedges, climbers, in one tree hole, crevices in coastal rocks and a quarry, and in nests of larger birds (disused and in use). None of these unusual records came from cities, and many were from rural parts of the Scottish mainland and islands (Dott 2006). It may be that nesting in less usual sites is commoner in regions with sparse human settlement with fewer buildings available to House Sparrows. Nesting in House Martin *Delichon urbicum* and Swallow *Hirundo rustica* nests was reported in both surveys; mostly in old or used nests though usurping may have occurred.

Elsewhere in the UK and in Europe generally, nesting by House Sparrows in tree branches and hedges is more frequent than seems to be the case in South-east Scotland, particularly in the warmer parts of their range where secure shelter is less crucial, and where House Sparrow density tends to be high and may exceed the number of holes available (Summers-Smith 1963, 1988). However, in the UK nesting habits may have changed over time. In the Nest Record Scheme Forum under the auspices of the British Trust for Ornithology, a subscriber who found House Sparrow nests only in holes in buildings asked whether other subscribers had ever found nests not in holes. In December 2014 there were 17 answers to his question, and 13 of these respondents had found House Sparrow nests in thick Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* hedges, coniferous trees, Ivy, and climbing plants on houses or walls, but mostly only in previous decades. Only four or five of the 13 had found such nests recently, while 11 of them remembered such nests in the 1960s–1990s, when they found them in trees, climbing plants and especially in thick hawthorn hedges, in greater numbers and more regularly than in recent years. Most replies concerning the 1960s–1990s referred to farmland or rural places, mostly in England, and two commented that with high population levels of House Sparrows at that time holes in buildings may have been insufficient for nesting requirements. High population levels in the 1970s–1980s are consistent with known UK trends (Marchant *et al.* 1990, Raven *et al.* 2002, Harris *et al.* 2014). It appears that House Sparrow nests in hedges, climbers and tree branches are probably less common in England now than prior to the 1990s, and that such non-cavity nests may be more unusual in South-east Scotland than in England and some more rural parts of Scotland.

Tree Sparrow

The great majority of nests were reported in buildings, tree holes, and nest-boxes (Table 1). Although there may be a bias towards seeing nests around human settlements, the number reported in buildings and walls seems higher than might be expected compared to those seen in tree holes. Six nests were seen in hedges (three in cypress, one in Yew *Taxus baccata*, two in Beech *Fagus sylvatica*), and 2–3 nests were seen in climbing plants. There were no reports of nests in tree branches. Tree Sparrows are rarely seen to nest in inhabited buildings in South-east Scotland (author and atlas fieldworkers), and prefer uninhabited out-buildings in crevices, under roof-tiles, behind gutters, or in high walls.

In most of Western Europe, tree holes are the Tree Sparrow's preferred nesting site, but buildings, walls, nest boxes, tree branches, nests of other birds, pylons and other man-made structures are all widely used. The proportion that use buildings and walls varies. Studies from the 1980s showed that about 30% of Tree Sparrows may nest in buildings and walls in Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, while two studies from the 1960s showed that 9–10% nested in buildings and walls in parts of the UK at that time, and 3–8% used tree branches in UK, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria (Cramp & Perrins 1994, Summers-Smith 1995). Of the two UK studies cited, one was in London published in 1962, and the other was an analysis of the Nest Record Cards of the British Trust for Ornithology published in 1964, to which contributors from Scotland form only a small minority. The present enquiry suggests that in northern parts of the UK the proportion of Tree Sparrows which nest in buildings and walls may be higher than in the earlier studies based largely in England, and that nesting in tree branches is rare in South-east Scotland. A recent example of Tree Sparrows nesting in an uninhabited farmstead in western Scotland hints at a similar situation there (Maxwell 2014).

Acknowledgements

I thank all those people who replied to the enquiry, and Stephen Welch for helpful information and comments.

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Plate 188. Peregrine, Glen Tanar, North-east Scotland, June 2015. © *Harry Scott*

Peregrines in North-east Scotland in 2014 - further decline in the uplands

North East Scotland Raptor Study Group

Peregrines in North-east Scotland were surveyed in 2014. Compared with previous studies there was an increase in coastal breeding Peregrines, but a decline in the uplands, trends persistent since 1991. Overall fewer Peregrines were recorded in 2014, but their breeding performance was relatively high. Low occupancy of nesting ranges, with more singletons than pairs, was associated with intensive management for driven grouse shooting. The results document a further decline in the Peregrine breeding population in the eastern Cairngorms National Park.

Introduction

Hardey *et al.* (2003) documented the breeding of Peregrines *Falco peregrinus* in North-east Scotland from 1991 to 2000, compared with two other regions of Scotland. The population in the north-east had increased since 1981 (Hardey 1991, Crick & Ratcliffe 1995), but declined in the decade prior to 2000, associated with land use. Over the ten years, the occupancy of 'nesting ranges' (Hardey *et al.* 2006) on grouse moor declined from over 80% in 1991 to 51% in 2000. Peregrines on land managed for grouse shooting had lower nest success than elsewhere although successful nests had similar brood sizes. Since then there has been a second full national survey (Banks *et al.* 2010) and further annual monitoring in North-east Scotland (Figure 1 in Hardey 2011) showing colonisation of lowland farmland and the coast, but further declines on grouse moor, to 35% occupancy in 2004.

In 2014, as part of the National Peregrine Survey, North East Scotland Raptor Study Group members and other surveyors visited almost all known Peregrine nesting ranges in the region documenting occupancy and breeding performance. This offered an opportunity to re-examine population change associated with land use by comparing the 2014 results with those from the earlier study and surveys.

Methods

The region (Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen and Moray east of the river Spey) is described in Hardey *et al.* (2003) and outlined on Figure 1 in Banks *et al.* (2010). In 2014, observers with previous experience of breeding Peregrines visited almost all known nesting ranges three times during the breeding season documenting evidence, including prey remains and faeces, birds seen, nest contents and fledged young; standard protocol for a Peregrine survey (Ratcliffe 1993, Crick & Ratcliffe 1995, Banks *et al.* 2010).

Each Peregrine nesting range was allocated to a primary land use category on the basis of the majority land use within 3 km of the nest sites. Land categories were forestry, sheep walk, deer forest, urban, grouse moor and lowland farming (defined in table 5.2 of Hardey *et al.* 2003). Since the earlier study, there had been minor changes in land use with more forestry plantation and some moorland managed more intensively than previously for driven grouse shooting. For the 2014 survey, as in 2003, the criteria used to define grouse moor was annual heather burning in small patches, well-maintained shooting butts, the provision of grit (including medicated grit) and the trapping of predators using cage traps for corvids and tunnel traps for small mustelids. On some areas of upland used predominantly for deer stalking or hill farming, there was also walked-up grouse shooting using dogs. These areas were classified as deer forest, forestry or sheepwalk because management for grouse was minimal, characterised by larger, less frequently burnt patches, little or no provision of grit and fewer traps.

In Hardey *et al.* (2003), coastal breeding birds were excluded from the analysis which was mainly concerned with variation associated with year, region and land use. In the present study, data from coastal nesting ranges were treated as an additional category, distinguished simply as being less than 3 km from the mean tidal high water of spring tides. Inland nesting ranges were those in all land use categories excluding coastal.

Results

In the north-east of Scotland, a total of 112 Peregrine nesting ranges were known and 109 (97%) visited during 2014. Only 56 (51% of those visited) were observed to be occupied, 43 by pairs and 13 by singletons (Table 1). All three most recent Peregrine surveys have examined nearly all known nesting ranges in the north-east of Scotland, so the overall numbers should reflect population trends (e.g. Banks *et al.* 2010). A comparison of the coastal numbers showed increases from 12 occupied nesting ranges in 1991, and 18 in 2002, to 20 in 2014. In contrast, the inland portion had 51 occupied nesting ranges in 1991, but only 41 in 2002, falling again to 36 by 2014. Hardey *et al.* (2003) had also documented decline in the inland breeding population from 59 occupied ranges in 1991 to 44 in 2000. Such raw numbers need to be treated with caution (see Dixon *et al.* 2008), but show differential trends with increase on the coast and substantial decrease in the uplands.

In 2014, the number of ranges occupied (by either pairs or singletons) varied significantly with current land use category (chi-sq=17.4, df=3, p=0.001); the percent occupied being highest (77%) on the coast and very low (21%) for nesting ranges on moorland used for driven grouse shooting (Table 1). The association with land use is even more pronounced if we ignore singletons and consider simply the occupancy by pairs, which were rarely found on grouse moor (chi-sq=21.8, df=3, p<0.001).

Table 1. Occupancy and breeding performance of Peregrines in North-east Scotland in 2014 summarised according to the main land use in the surrounding terrain.

Terrain	*Number of known nesting ranges*	*Nesting ranges checked in 2014*	*Nesting ranges occupied by pairs*	*Nesting ranges occupied by singles*	*Minimum successful nests*	*% pairs successful (minimum)*	*Mean brood size* (n)*
Coast	27	26	17 (65%)	3	11	65%	2.22 (9)
Lowland farmland	14	14	9 (64%)	1	6	67%	2.75 (4)
Deer forest	34	33	12 (36%)	5	7	58%	2.25 (4)
Grouse moorland	28	28	2 (7%)	4	1	**	**
Other ***	9	8	3	0	1		4 (1)
All	**112**	**109**	**43 (39%)**	**13**	**26**	**60%**	**2.44 (18)**

* mean size of broods with very large or fledged young
** on grouse moorland, one attempt failed at the egg stage and the other fledged at least one young
*** includes three urban nesting ranges, five in forest and one in sheep walk

Breeding performance in 2014 was relatively high, with 26 (60%) of 43 of observed pairs successful in producing an average of 2.44 (se=0.19) large young. Previous overall breeding success figures for the region were 55–60% success and 2.29–2.44 mean brood size during the years 1961 to 1979 (Ratcliffe 2003). For 1991, Crick & Ratcliffe (1995) reported breeding performance for the region as 57% success and 1.71 mean brood sizes for coastal pairs, 64% success and 2.06 mean brood sizes inland. Hardey *et al.* (2003) report a mean brood size of 2.22 young for successful inland nests over the years 1991–2000. Their annual figures for nest success averaged 65% for most inland attempts and 33% for the few on grouse moorland. The figures for 2014 (Table 1) suggest similar success and a higher average brood size, but samples were too small and disparate to properly test for differences between years, or between land uses within 2014.

Discussion

The breeding population of Peregrines in the north-east of Scotland has been monitored in detail since 1975 with changes in both numbers and distribution well documented (summarised in Hardey 2011). Together with the earlier studies, the 2014 survey results suggest Peregrines in North-east Scotland have increased further on the coast and continued to decline in the uplands, particularly on intensively managed grouse moor where in 2014 only two pairs and four singletons were found.

Occupancy could be underestimated if not all alternative nesting sites are visited or if breeding attempts fail early and birds abandon the site. In 2014 this was unlikely because nesting ranges were well known, visits were not tardy, and most observers were both experienced and skilled using observations of faeces and prey remains as well as of birds. The survey's key result involved fieldwork in areas that were easiest to search. Most nesting ranges on moorland were on relatively small rocks which were easily checked for both birds and prey remains. By comparison, birds on the coast were less easy to locate because of the continuous potential breeding habitat, including nesting sites that could not be viewed from above. That said, birds were often obvious as they perched high on sea cliff buttresses, with both droppings and plucked prey remains evident. The change in numbers on the coast might thus be complicated by birds obscurely shifting nest site, but the numbers inland are difficult to dispute. The decline of breeding Peregrines recorded in earlier studies is endorsed; in 2014 there were simply even fewer Peregrines to be found at traditional breeding places in the uplands, particularly on moorland managed for driven grouse shooting.

Both Hardey *et al.* (2003) and Banks *et al.* (2010) suggest the decline of breeding Peregrines on grouse moorland is the result of killing by game keepers in a sustained effort to reduce the numbers of grouse predators. It is difficult to argue otherwise. Amongst alternative explanations, for example, a reduction in Peregrine food supply is unlikely because Red Grouse *Lagopus l.*

scotica (the main prey by weight) are superabundant on these intensively managed moors. Indeed, 2014 saw record-breaking grouse bags on many estates (www.shootinguk.co.uk/news/moors-report-record-grouse-bags-6860). It is possible that some other aspect of management for grouse might be reducing the numbers of Peregrines, such as protracted muirburn or the persistent long term use of anthelminthic drugs (medicated grit), but such speculation lacks rational foundation; the most parsimonious explanation is that, as has been established for other birds of prey (Scottish Raptor Study Groups 1997, Whitfield *et al.* 2003, Fielding *et al.* 2011), Peregrines are killed on a broad scale and persistently, as newcomers repeatedly attempt to colonise untenanted breeding sites. Such killing reduces the chance of re-colonisation, and moreover reduces recruitment in nearby less intensively managed upland.

The history of the killing of Peregrines on grouse moors is well documented (Ratcliffe 1993, Hardey 2007) and the decline in breeding pairs since 1991 is well reported, initially published by Scottish Natural Heritage (Hardey *et al.* 2003) and several times since. Despite previous publication the results from 2014 show further decline. The context and scale of the decline is alone of major concern, but has further significance because the north-east of Scotland forms around 40% of the Cairngorms National Park designated in 2003, and currently claimed to be "a stronghold for Britain's wildlife" (cairngorms.co.uk, accessed 13 May 2015). The eastern portion of the National Park has 53 known Peregrine nesting ranges and in 2014, 51 of these were visited, but only 17 were occupied, 12 by pairs and five by singletons. In 2014, the North-east Scotland portion of the park held less than a quarter of the number of Peregrines that bred in 1991.

Plate 189. Peregrine, North-east Scotland, April 2008. © *Ed Duthie*

Acknowledgements

This study resulted from collaborative effort by members of the North East Scotland Raptor Study Group. Jon Hardey long co-ordinated the monitoring of Peregrines in North-east Scotland, tracking post-pesticide population changes for over 30 years and establishing the spatial configuration of nesting pairs. Ian Francis and Jenny Weston reviewed nesting locations, co-ordinated the efforts of 30 observers (North East Scotland Raptor Study Group members and other surveyors) in 2014 and collated the resulting data. Mick Marquiss produced the initial text for this note and Ian Francis, Jon Hardey, Gavin Legge and Alastair Pout commented usefully on drafts. Mark Wilson of the British Trust for Ornithology Scotland organised the 2014 national survey in Scotland providing some background information essential to our local effort. SNH issued licences to NESRSG members to disturb Peregrines for the purpose of population monitoring. We thank all those who took part and contributed information on Peregrines in 2014.

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Plate 190. Surveying for breeding waders amongst the dune slacks on the coastal side of the machair plain: Berneray, Sound of Harris, June 2007. © *J. Calladine*

Changes in breeding wader populations of the Uist machair between 1983 and 2014

J. CALLADINE, E.M. HUMPHREYS & J. BOYLE

Periodic extensive surveys of machair and associated habitats on the west coast of North Uist, Benbecula and South Uist (Outer Hebrides) have documented changes in the composition of an important breeding wader assemblage. Within a 123 km² survey area, there has been an 18% decline in the total number of breeding waders recorded between 1983 and 2014. Dunlin and Ringed Plover showed the most marked decline, while Oystercatcher and Redshank both increased. Changes in breeding numbers tended to be more negative in a southern zone (South Uist and Benbecula) where introduced Hedgehogs are important predators of wader eggs. Declines in the breeding populations of Dunlin and Ringed Plover in areas where Hedgehogs have been largely absent (North Uist) suggests that predation by Hedgehogs is unlikely to have been the only driver of change.

Introduction

The west coast habitats of South Uist, Benbecula, North Uist and islands in the Sound of Harris, hold concentrations of breeding waders that are exceptional in Scottish, British and wider European contexts. In 1983, this region (hereafter referred to as 'Uist') was estimated to hold approximately a third and a quarter of the UK breeding populations of Dunlin *Calidris alpina* and Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* respectively (Fuller *et al.* 1986). By 2000, overall and widespread losses of approximately 50% in both the Ringed Plover and Dunlin populations had occurred (Jackson *et al.* 2004). Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* numbers had increased in all areas, however, showing an overall rise of nearly 40%. Other species did not show such uniform

trends across all the islands. Redshank *Tringa totanus* and Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* both declined on South Uist but increased on North Uist. Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* also declined on South Uist and Benbecula but showed no change on much of North Uist (Jackson *et al.* 2004). There is compelling evidence that some of the declines were associated with predation of eggs by Hedgehogs *Erinaceus europaeus* (Jackson & Green 2000, Jackson 2001, Jackson *et al.* 2004), which were introduced to the southern part of South Uist in 1974 (Jackson 2007). By the mid-1990s, Hedgehogs had spread throughout the west coastal areas of that island and to Benbecula, Grimsay and onto the southern part of North Uist (Jackson *et al.* 2004). A programme to control Hedgehogs had largely removed them from North Uist by the mid-2000s and was extended to include Benbecula, but Hedgehogs continued to be relatively widespread on Benbecula and occurrences on North Uist were mostly restricted to the western part where densities were low compared to some areas of South Uist. For most of the period since the first extensive survey of breeding waders in 1983, South Uist and Benbecula supported moderate to high densities of Hedgehogs, while most of North Uist with associated islands and Berneray were largely free of Hedgehogs (Figure 1). A repeat survey of the Uists' breeding wader populations in 2007 suggested that, overall, the decline of Ringed Plover had possibly levelled off and the rate of decline in Dunlin numbers had possibly also slowed to some extent (Fuller *et al.* 2010). Some of the changes in breeding wader populations may also have been influenced by changes in land use and vegetation (Calladine *et al.* 2014). Here we report on a fourth repeat extensive survey of about 123 km^2 ha of machair and associated habitats on the Uist west coast in 2014.

Methods

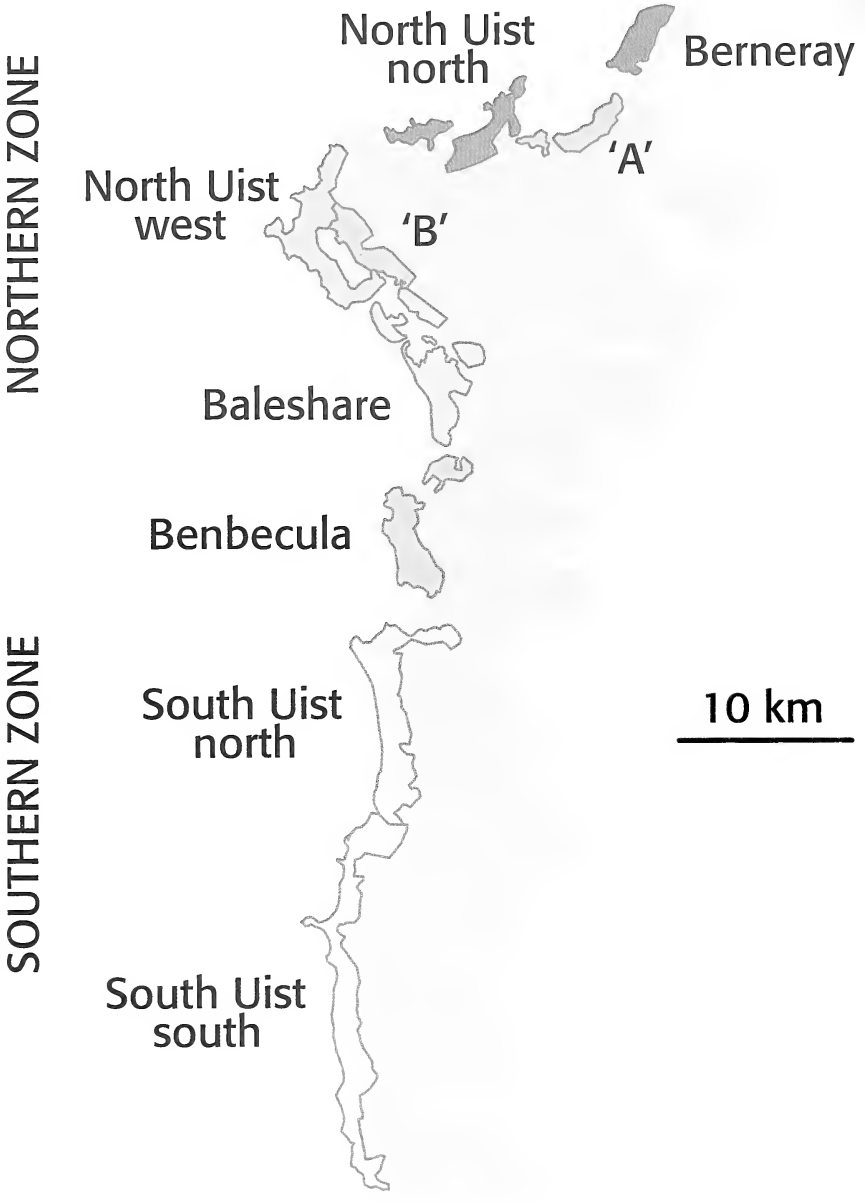
Transect surveys were carried out between 25 May and 13 June 2014 based on a single visit and using the same methods (Reed & Fuller 1983) and comparable timings as for the three previous extensive surveys in 1983, 2000 and 2007. Where possible, observers walked parallel transect lines 100 to 150 m apart. Where physical obstructions prevented this, a constant-effort-search approach was adopted whereby a single observer walked to within 100 m of all areas to give equivalent survey coverage. The timing was chosen to coincide with a period of high detectability when most waders are expected to have dependent young and give alarm calls as transects are walked. The positions of all waders were recorded on 1:10,000 maps using standard codes and the number of apparent breeding pairs estimated using species-specific criteria as described by Reed & Fuller (1983). For a species-specific discussion of the limitations of the method used in surveying machair waders see Fuller and Jackson (1999). In view of these known limitations, we refer to the counts as 'apparent pairs'. The area surveyed included nearly all of the machair plain and some associated 'blackland' habitats (Ritchie, 1976, 1979, Angus 2004, Pakeman *et al.* 2011). In addition to the 123 km^2 which was surveyed in common with the three earlier extensive surveys, a further 14 km^2 of machair, blackland and reseeded pasture on North Uist were also surveyed in 2014 (Figure 1).

Results

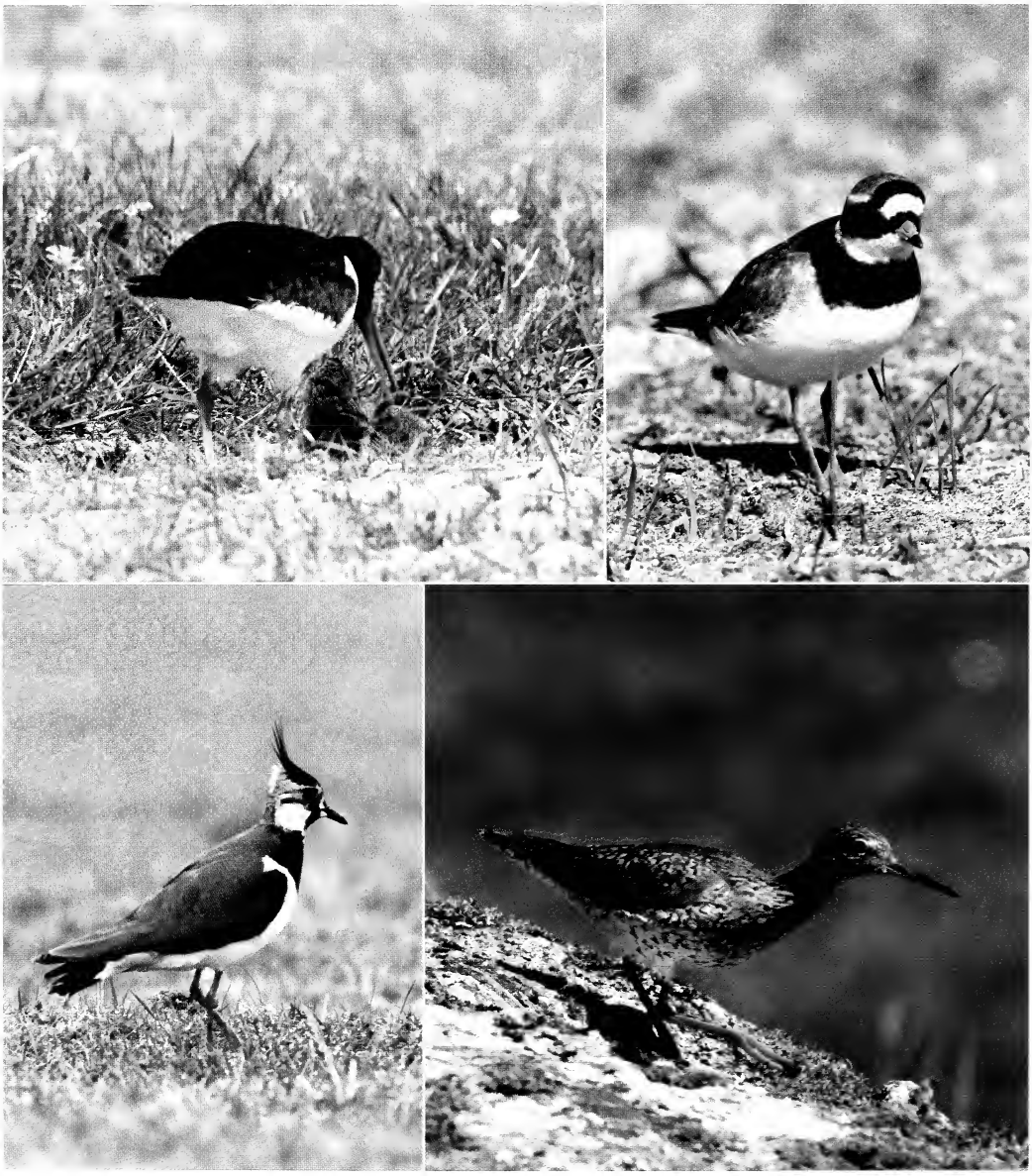
A total of 8,973 apparent breeding pairs of the six most numerous breeding waders were counted in 2014 within the areas common to the previous surveys (Table 1), an overall decline of 18% since 1983. A further 813 apparent pairs were recorded in the additional areas of North Uist that were surveyed in 2014 but not all three of the earlier surveys (Table 1). Scarce species not reported in the previous surveys included Curlew *Numenius arquata* (two apparent pairs), Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* (eight apparent pairs) and Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* (four apparent breeding males).

The greatest overall proportional declines since 1983 were of Dunlin and Ringed Plover (72% and 70% respectively). Snipe declined overall by 45% and Lapwing by 14% while, in contrast, Redshank increased by 8% and Oystercatcher by 74%. The changes were not the same in the zones with and without Hedgehogs (Figure 2). The deviation in trends between these zones was most marked for Redshank (which had increased by 91% between 1983 and 2014 in the northern,

Figure 1. Machair and associated habitats that were surveyed for breeding waders in May–June 2014. The Southern Zone (including Benbecula and southwards) are areas where Hedgehogs have remained widespread and relatively abundant. The Northern Zone (including Baleshare and northwards) are areas where Hedgehogs have remained scarce or absent. Additional areas that were not included in all three of the previous extensive surveys are 'A' (reseeds) and 'B' (machair and blackland).



Hedgehog-free zone compared to a decline of 22% in the southern zone with Hedgehogs) and Snipe (a decline of 53% in the southern zone compared to a more modest 13% decline in the northern zone) (Figure 2). Dunlin and Ringed Plover declined markedly in both zones, though less so in the northern zone (54% compared to 79% for Dunlin and 65% compared to 79% for Ringed Plover). Any difference in trends was less apparent for Lapwing (Figure 2), though it does appear that they may have fared less well in the southern zone (2014 counts were 27% lower than in 1983 for the southern zone, but 7% higher in the northern). Oystercatcher increased markedly across both zones (by 66% in the southern zone and 81% in the northern) (Figure 2).



Plates 191–194. Machair breeding waders (clockwise); Oystercatcher feeding young, Lochdar, South Uist, Outer Hebrides, June 2013. Ringed Plover, Lochdar, South Uist, Outer Hebrides, June 2013. Redshank, Bornish, South Uist, Outer Hebrides, June 2013. Lapwing, Borve, Berneray, Outer Hebrides, May 2013. © all *Yvonne Benting*

Table 1. Counts of apparent breeding pairs of waders on the Uist machair in 1983, 2000, 2007 and 2014.

Area	Year	Oystercatcher	Ringed Plover	Lapwing	Dunlin	Snipe	Redshank
South Uist south	1983	349	559	841	425	225	671
	2000	415	202	657	96	47	376
	2007	559	241	943	127	90	495
	2014	518	123	561	34	58	400
South Uist north	1983	363	558	739	699	95	396
	2000	439	284	374	372	72	197
	2007	467	220	699	256	40	324
	2014	699	93	376	198	73	292
Benbecula	1983	216	170	289	220	56	221
	2000	291	99	278	134	43	196
	2007	216	116	322	127	71	279
	2014	323	49	428	49	47	306
Baleshare	1983	178	110	228	96	25	98
	2000	330	55	334	94	28	165
	2007	198	60	198	71	15	158
	2014	297	29	219	43	17	138
North Uist west	1983	506	293	645	221	55	313
	2000	677	130	615	146	51	424
	2007	556	169	521	163	53	443
	2014	642	91	430	70	44	392
North Uist north	1983	166	157	126	57	8	37
	2000	275	142	233	72	7	88
	2007	216	88	289	40	4	140
	2014	438	80	286	40	15	202
Berneray	1983	57	200	105	161	2	38
	2000	161	58	225	90	9	92
	2007	131	71	188	73	2	117
	2014	269	67	246	94	2	195
North Uist north 'extra'	2014	175	4	98	8	9	102
North Uist 'reseeds'	2014	182	0	59	32	26	118

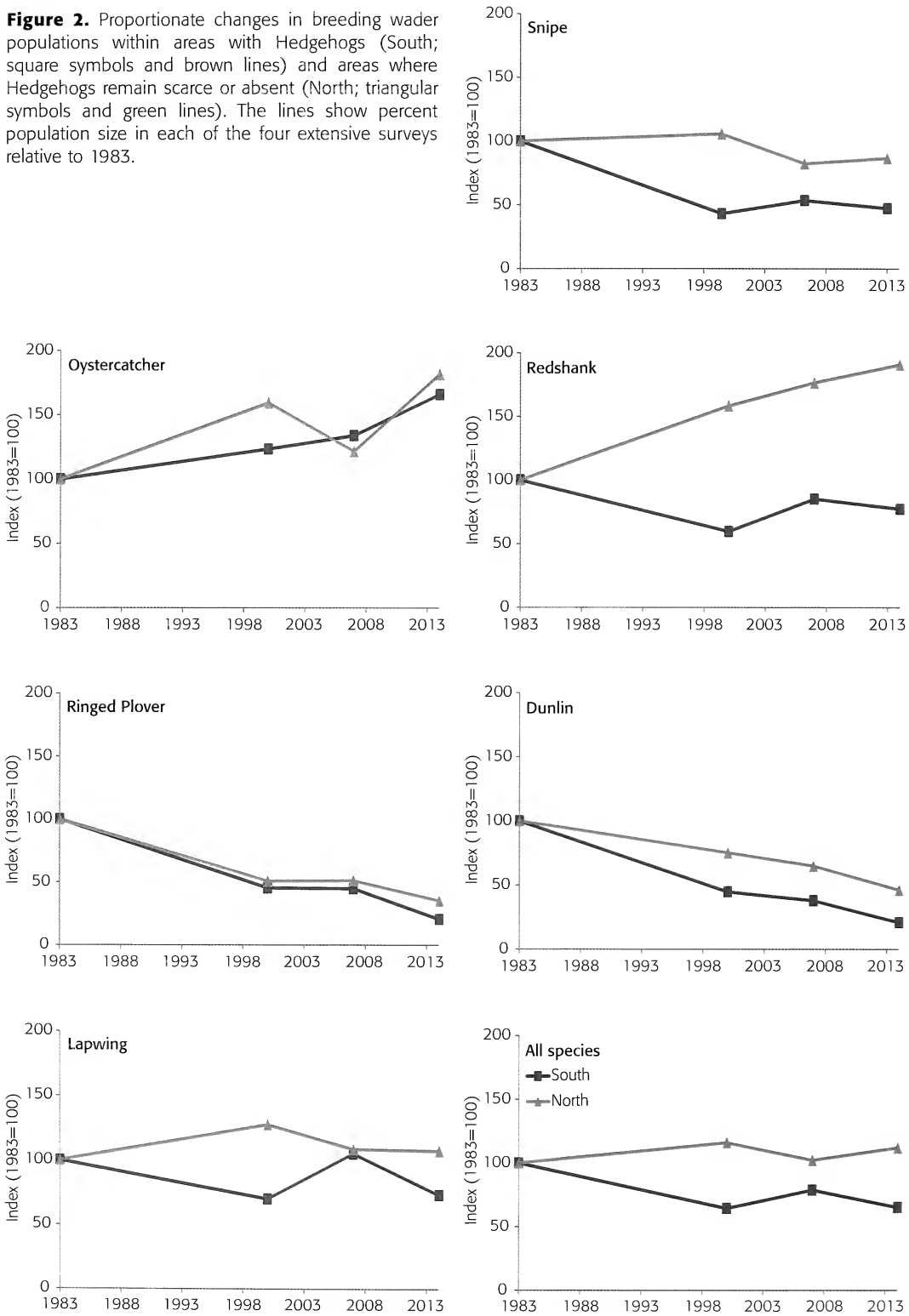
Note: Data from 1983–2007 is taken from Fuller 1986, Jackson *et al.* 2004 and Fuller *et al.* 2010. Correction factors used in some earlier publications of the 1983 and 2000 counts for Dunlin and Snipe are removed to permit direct comparison. Counts for Vallay (reported separately in some earlier publications) are here included in those for North Uist north.

Discussion

Across the machair survey areas that had been included in all four extensive surveys, there had been a decline of 18% in the overall number of breeding waders recorded between 1983 and 2014. The rates of change differed between species, however, resulting in a large change in the composition of the breeding wader assemblage. Dunlin, Ringed Plover and Snipe had decreased, while Redshank and Oystercatcher had increased. Single-visit surveys of waders, as used in the extensive surveys of machair, are not designed to detect small changes in population sizes or within small subsets of the survey area; factors affecting detectability were expected to account for up to 20% of the variation in counts for Lapwing, Dunlin and Redshank (Fuller & Jackson 1999). It is expected, however, that broad trends over wider areas will be representative of real changes.

General declines in Dunlin, Ringed Plover and Snipe have been reported more widely across Britain over the past three and four decades (Conway *et al.* 2008, Balmer *et al.* 2013). However, the increased, or near-stable, populations of Redshank and Lapwing on the Uist machair are

Figure 2. Proportionate changes in breeding wader populations within areas with Hedgehogs (South; square symbols and brown lines) and areas where Hedgehogs remain scarce or absent (North; triangular symbols and green lines). The lines show percent population size in each of the four extensive surveys relative to 1983.



counter to observed declines across the rest of Britain (Balmer *et al.* 2013, Harris *et al.* 2014). The increase in Oystercatchers on the Uist machair is consistent with a range increase across Britain between 1970 and 2010 (Balmer *et al.* 2013), but is counter to some general declines in abundance in Scotland reported since 1995 (Harris *et al.* 2014). Given these more widespread changes in breeding waders across Britain, the Uist machair remains important for that group of birds and their relative importance for Redshank and Lapwing will have increased.

Population changes tended to be more negative in the southern zone (with Hedgehogs) than in the in northern zone (mostly without Hedgehogs). This is consistent with the hypothesis that predation of clutches by Hedgehogs is a causal factor of declines for some species (or potentially limiting any increase of Redshanks in the southern zone). The continued and marked decline of both Ringed Plover and Dunlin across both zones is cause for concern and suggests that factors other than clutch predation by Hedgehogs are contributing to limitations of some species' populations. Recent work provides strong evidence that Hedgehogs remain important predators of clutches some 40 years after their original introduction to the islands, but the extent to which it is additive to predation from other sources (notably by gulls of both eggs and young) remains difficult to assess because of gaps in our knowledge of wader demography (Calladine *et al.* 2015). Although the removal of Hedgehogs from Uist, as an introduced non-native predator, seems a sensible approach to conserve breeding waders, the role of other determinants of change such as land use and how the resultant changes in machair structure and composition interacts with predation deserve further attention.

Plate 195. Associated habitats with the machair are more acidic grasslands ('blackland'), mires and other wetlands, a combination that supports important populations of breeding waders: Baleshare, May 2014. © *J. Calladine*

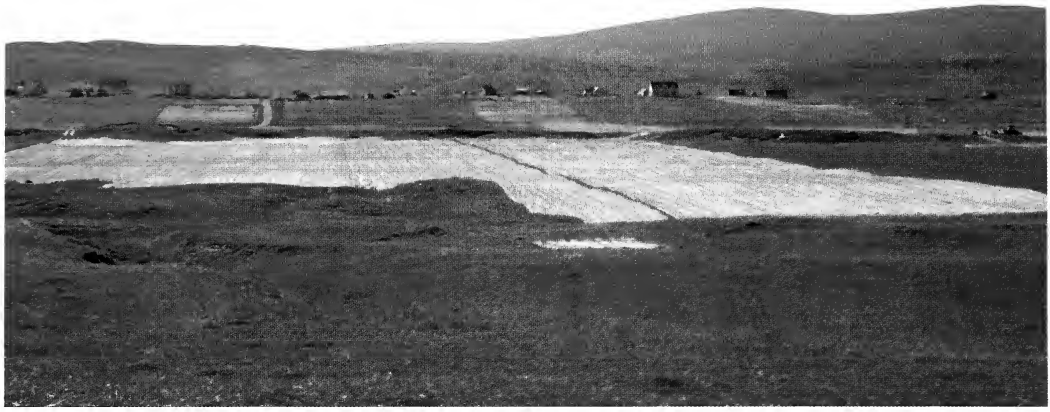


Plate 196. The machair is a sandy plain, cultivated in places between coastal dune systems and grading into the peat dominated interiors of the islands: North Uist north, May 2014. © *J. Calladine*

Plate 197. On South Uist, introduced Hedgehogs are important predators of wader nests: South Uist south, April 2012. © *J. Calladine*

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Crossbills feeding on grit from wind farm access tracks

Construction works to extend the existing Black Law Wind Farm, located near Shotts in North Lanarkshire, have been on-going since October 2014. I am based on site on a full-time basis and have regularly heard and observed flocks of Crossbills *Loxia curvirostra* across the development area during the construction period to date. However, I was particularly interested to note in January and February 2015 small groups of these birds landing on the newly constructed stone access tracks and apparently feeding on grit from the surface. This type of behaviour has been recorded in Scotland previously by Nethersole-Thompson (1975), with birds observed taking grit from the chimneys of keepers' and crofters' houses. I believe it has also been recorded in Crossbills and White-winged (Two-barred) Crossbills *Loxia leucoptera* in North America.

Plates 198–199. Crossbills taking grit from a track, near Shotts, Clyde, January 2015. © *Tony Marshall*

Although I made several observations of the birds landing in snowy conditions (Plate 199), it did not appear that they had landed to drink from it. Indeed, I have seen birds on the ground at times when there is no snow present. Similarly, the birds were not eating salt from the track surface (a behaviour which has also been recorded by Nethersole-Thompson (1975)) as none had been applied at the site as a method of keeping the roads free of ice.

The birds observed feeding on the tracks have shown a high degree of tolerance to the large amounts of construction and human activity taking place nearby - including 360° excavators, dumper trucks and tipper lorries - and I was able to take (poor quality) photographs using my phone from inside my vehicle at a distance of only two or three metres away (Plate 199). On this occasion, the flock comprised three females and one male. I noted that the females showed a greater desire to feed on the track surface, flying down quickly after vehicles had passed, while the male remained in the tree and was perhaps less interested in eating the grit.

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Plate 200. Juvenile Capercaillie showing the consumption of the breast tissue (before dissection). Sternum does not show notches indicative of predation by a bird of prey. @ *SRUC*

Predation of well-grown Capercaillie chick probably by a Pine Marten

Whilst assessing the breeding success of Capercaillie *Tetrao urogallus* on 8 August 2014 in a forest near Aviemore, Strathspey, one of the pointing dogs located a freshly killed male Capercaillie chick on a mound of Blaeberry *Vaccinium myrtillus*; a second male chick was crouched beside the mound, just 30 cm from the carcass and a third male chick one metre away. Both flew off strongly. No adult female was located, but a few female feathers were found half a metre from the carcass suggesting she had been present with her brood, but had been flushed. The dead chick was 600 mm from head to tip of tail, with wing length of 315 mm, and weighed 425 g. This brood would have been approximately nine weeks old, assuming that hatching was close to the mean hatch date of 8 June reported for this area in the early 1990s (Baines *et al.* 1996).

Inspection of the dead chick found that approximately half of the breast meat had been consumed (Plate 200) and there was torn flesh and bruising at the back of the neck, indicating puncture marks (Plate 201). The eye was clear, the carcass warm and ticks were still attached suggesting that death had been recent. The carcass was taken to Inverness Disease Surveillance Centre for post-mortem. It was noted that the edge of the wound margin was ragged, with no damage to the sternum, consistent with mammalian scavenging or predation. There was significant haemorrhage over the neck and in particular behind the head with puncture marks 17–22 mm apart, often in discrete pairs. The veterinarian felt these observations were most consistent with predation by a species of mustelid, for example a Pine Marten *Martes martes* (SRUC unpublished post mortem report). The inter-canine distance rules out the smaller Stoat *Mustela erminea* (Lyver 2000), but overlaps with the size of Wildcat *Felis silvestris* (or a hybrid). However Wildcat signs are more often seen by estate staff on the forest edge in proximity to Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus* rich habitats.

Pine Martens mainly eat small mammals, but also feed on eggs, chicks and adult birds, including Capercaillie (Wegge & Kastdalen 2007, Caryl *et al.* 2012). Pine Martens predated an estimated third of the Capercaillie nests

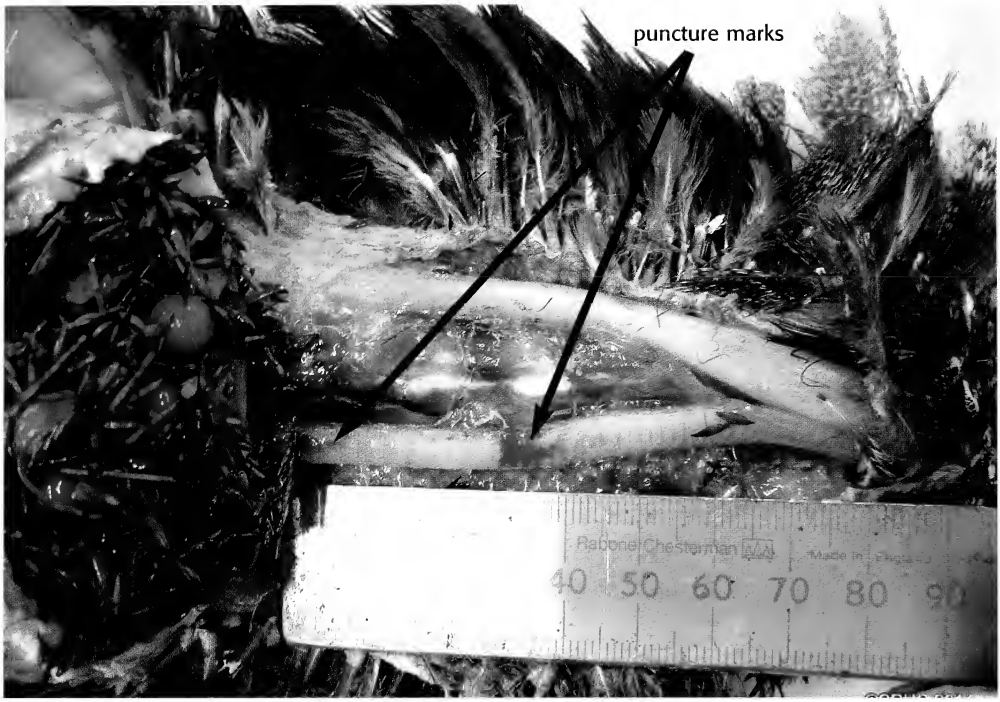

Plate 201. Juvenile Capercaillie (after dissection) showing paired puncture marks on the neck (arrows), typical of a mustelid/wildcat, and the contents of the crop including Cowberry *Vaccinium vitis-idaea* berries and leaves. *@SRUC*

monitored in Abernethy Forest after correcting for potential bias due to cameras at nests (Summers *et al.* 2009). Studies in Fennoscandina implicate the Pine Marten and Fox as predators that can depress the breeding success of woodland grouse species (Marcström *et al.* 1988). Whether Pine Martens have a significant impact in Scotland, and what, if anything, should be done about it, is a contentious and topical issue. Our observation highlights the vulnerability of even well-developed chicks capable of flight. The lack of predator avoidance by siblings suggests the possibility of further brood predation by an individual predator.

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An analysis of Barn Owl pellets from Nithsdale, Dumfries & Galloway

This note summarises findings from a study of 1,766 Barn Owl *Tyto alba* pellets which we collected from seven regularly occupied nest sites within 15 km² of Thornhill, Mid Nithsdale, Dumfriesshire. The pellets were then analysed by R.A. Love. South-west Scotland is the headquarters of the Barn Owl in Scotland (Taylor *et al.* 1988, Shaw 1994). Pellets have long been studied as the skeletal remains provide an accurate record of the prey consumed (The Barn Owl Trust 2001) and are slow to disintegrate when protected from wind and rain, for example in buildings or boxes. Within boxes though they tend to become fragmented by trampling from the occupants. The pellets weighed from 60 to 150 g and lost 50% of their original weight on drying out. A total of 6,928 prey items was recovered from the pellets; an average of 3.92 prey items per pellet. Sites varied by altitude and surrounding habitat, but a common factor was their proximity to farm buildings.

The pellet contents can indicate the nutritional importance to the owl's diet of each prey species. (R.A. Love in litt., Glue 1974). The food value of a species is closely related to its total body weight. The total number of prey in each collection of pellets has been multiplied by a conversion factor (based on weight) for that particular species, which estimates its body weight and hence food value. Several formulae are available. The one used in Table 1 makes an allowance for seasonal variation of the weight of the prey proportional to the body weight, rather than an absolute weight value. For example the prey value conversion factor for a Field Vole would be 2.1, for a Wood Mouse 1.8 and for Pygmy Shrew 0.4.

Birds were not specifically identified in most cases, but recorded within the database in five weight classes. Body weight was based on the length of the humerus or sternum and bill size. Within this pellet collection, birds provided just 39 of the 6,928 prey items, 0.6% of the total prey items. The corresponding value by prey weight is 68 of a total prey value of 10,950.3, which represents 0.4%.

A single dead Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* appeared in a box situated near to moorland habitat and a single Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* in a site close to the shore. Redwing *Turdus iliacus* was recorded at one site and a recently fledged young Swallow *Hirundo rustica,* probably taken

Table 1. Analysis of 1,766 Nithsdale Barn Owl pellets in terms of prey items and prey value.

Species	Total prey items	% prey items	% food value
Field Vole *Microtus arvensis*	3,806	54.9	73.0
Bank Vole *Myodes glareolus*	222	3.2	3.2
Wood Mouse *Apodemus sylvaticus*	452	6.5	7.4
House Mouse *Mus domesticus*	20	0.3	0.2
Brown Rat *Rattus norvegicus*	4	0.1	0.2
Common Shrew *Sorex araneus*	1,682	24.3	12.3
Pygmy Shrew *Sorex minutus*	642	9.3	2.3
Water Shrew *Neomys fodiens*	35	0.5	0.4
Mole *Talpa europea*	2	>0.1	0
Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*	1	>0.1	0.1
Brown Long-eared Bat *Plecotus auritus*	1	>0.1	>0.1
Pipistrelle Bat *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*	1	>0.1	>0.1
Large mammal	1	>0.1	0.1
Very small bird	7	0.1	0.1
Small bird	14	0.2	0.1
Medium bird	14	0.2	0.2
Large bird	3	>0.1	>0.1
Very large bird	1	>0.1	>0.1
Amphibian	20	0.3	0.2
TOTALS	**6,928**	**100**	**100**

Average items per pellet = 3.92

in the barn where the owl was nesting, at another. Single Wrens *Troglodytes troglodytes* were found in two owl boxes.

Twelve small mammal species were identified in the pellets from the Nithsdale collections. Field Vole was the primary prey species followed in importance by Common Shrew. The contribution from these two alone is almost 80%. Bank Vole, Wood Mouse and Pygmy Shrew added a further 19%, giving a total of 98.2 % of the prey provided by five small mammals.

Acknowledgements

This study owes much to Alasdair Love, National Owl Pellet Survey co-ordinator for The Mammal Society of London, who facilitated the identification of the pellets. We are also grateful to land owners and agents who allowed us to erect and subsequently examine our Barn Owl boxes. For their own and the owls' security the farm names must remain only on file. We also benefited from discussion with David Gray, Duncan Irvine, Mark Robb, Sara Skalman, Geoff Sheppard and John Young. We are especially grateful to the late David Glue of the British Trust for Ornithology who improved this manuscript by commenting on earlier drafts. *Full details of the pellet analysis have been lodged in the library at Waterston House.*

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Plate 202. White-tailed Eagle reared in close proximity to Osprey © *Morag Rae*

Successful breeding by close-nesting White-tailed Eagles and Ospreys in Scotland

The populations of both White-tailed Eagles *Haliaeetus albicilla* and Ospreys *Pandion haliaetus* are increasing in Scotland. Both species were persecuted during the 19th century and breeding ceased. Ospreys re-established as a regular breeding species from the 1950s and re-introduced White-tailed Eagles first bred successfully in 1985 (Forrester *et al.* 2007). By 2013 the number of breeding attempts monitored by the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme was 194 and 62 for Osprey and White-tailed Eagle respectively (Challis *et al.* 2014).

There are few historical records of close nesting or interaction between the species in Scotland. Since re-establishment there has been geographical separation of nesting areas and it is only in recent years that their breeding ranges have started to converge (Forrester *et al.* 2007). However, with the continuing increase of the populations of both species in Scotland and the recent programme to re-introduce White-tailed Eagles to the east coast, the likelihood of interaction between these species has greatly increased. With a substantial part of both current populations choosing to nest in trees, competition for nest sites becomes a real possibility. We report here on an instance of close-nesting on the west coast of Scotland.

The site in west Scotland was first occupied by Ospreys in 2010 when they reared one young in a nest in an old Scots Pine *Pinus sylestris* situated close to the loch shore. The following year this nest was blown out during a storm in late May, after which the pair built a frustration eyrie nearby, also in an old Scots Pine. In 2012, they successfully reared two young from their

new nest and three young in 2013. Pellets and the remains of a Razorbill *Alca torda* found below the nest in late winter 2013/14 indicated that it had been visited by White-tailed Eagles on several occasions. However, the new White-tailed Eagle pair built their first nest in an old Scots Pine that was 440 m away but directly visible from the Osprey nest. The White-tailed Eagle pair, comprising a four-year-old female from the eastern Scotland release programme and a young male (less than six years old), subsequently laid a clutch of two eggs and reared a single chick which fledged in late July.

The White-tailed Eagles began incubating before ownership of the Osprey site had been fully established in 2014. Four Ospreys were actively and noisily disputing ownership on 11 April apparently without attracting the attention of the White-tailed Eagles. Observations during the rest of the breeding season were limited as the two nest sites could not easily be viewed at a range that would not cause disturbance and it was not known to what extent interactions occurred between the two species. A pair of Ospreys subsequently became established and laid eggs at the nest used in 2013. The clutch size of the Ospreys was not known, but a single chick hatched and fledged shortly after 29 July.

Elsewhere, White-tailed Eagles interacting with Ospreys have been reported previously and include White-tailed Eagles evicting Ospreys from their nest sites (Love 1983). In Canada, it was postulated that the closely related Bald Eagle *Haliaeetus leucocephalus* may have excluded Ospreys from suitable breeding habitat (Poole 1989). Flemming & Bancroft (1990) describe a Bald Eagle attacking a nestling Osprey, but concluded this may have been an example of kleptoparasitism, which has been widely reported by Bald Eagles on Ospreys (Bent 1937, Ogden 1975, Gerrard *et al.* 1976, Prevost 1979). However, a Bald Eagle has also been recorded attacking and killing an adult Osprey (MacDonald & Seymour 1994). While there would have been the potential for various competitive interactions at this site in 2014, it is encouraging to note the successful breeding of both these species in such close proximity.

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Letter to the Editors:

Fault bars

In *Scottish Birds* 35(1), both Andrews & Eden (2015) and Gillon (2015) make reference to growth/fault bars. Maybe confusingly, their interpretation in these two cases leads to different conclusions and with an apparent lack of understanding amongst some birders and ringers, it may be opportune to expand here on the cause and field use - and limitations - of growth/fault bars. The subject requires more than a short letter to cover it in the detail it deserves, but I hope the information below will prove of some interest and of some use to birders and ringers alike.

Growth bars are alternating lighter and darker bands along the length of a feather running perpendicular to the feather shaft (Plate 203). They are entirely normal, found in every feather of every species. The alternating lighter and darker bands represent growth of a feather during night- and day-time respectively; thus, one lighter band and one darker band within a feather represents 24 hours of feather growth (Riddle 1908, Wood 1950). If a bird suffers from a period of nutritional stress during feather growth, the sections of feather grown during that period will be deficient in barbules, integral to the feather's structure. This barbule deficient area of the feather, paler/more translucent than the neighbouring sections of the feather and obviously visible to the unaided eye, is a fault bar (Newton 1968). A feather may show one or several fault bars of varying width depending on the number and duration of nutritionally stressed periods.

Fault bars can be present in any feather but are often most visible in the rectrices (tail feathers). There are likely multiple reasons for this: the rectrices are large and visible; a fault bar in the tail is likely to be less detrimental to a bird than the same fault bar in the remiges (flight feathers) - it has been shown that the presence of fault bars may increase a bird's risk of predation (Møller *et al.* 2009); and the 'fault bar allocation hypothesis' (Jovani & Blas 2004) suggests that birds could have evolved mechanisms for reducing fault bar load on the most critical feathers (e.g. outer remiges).

Since fault bars are formed during a feather's growth stage, it follows that any feather growing during the same period of nutritional stress will be subject to the same fault bar formation. A feather tract growing simultaneously, with all feathers at the same stage of growth, will thus show the same fault bar aligned across all feathers in the tract at an equal distance from the feather tip.

The commonest scenario for simultaneous growth of all feathers in a feather tract is as a nestling acquires its juvenile plumage, when fault bars can be rather extreme - nestlings are subject to a high physiological stress as they grow their entire plumage in one go, as well as being at the mercy of the parent birds' abilities to provide a continuous supply of sufficient nourishment - but this is not the only scenario. The complete loss and subsequent regrowth of a feather tract leads to simultaneous growth of the tract with potential for an aligned fault bar.

Loss of the tail is encountered relatively frequently - tail loss is the first line of defence for a bird attacked from behind, and tails can easily become snagged on thorny branches - but loss of the entirety of other major feather tracts should be impossible. It seems improbable that a small bird would lose all remiges on both wings and inconceivable that it could subsequently survive long enough to regrow the lost feathers. Thus, in European passerines at least, a fault bar aligned across the entire set of remiges on both wings (Plates 204 & 205) must be the result of feathers grown in the nest, and the bird's remiges must be juvenile. The same is not true of an aligned fault bar across the tail, since the tail can be rather easily lost and regrown at any stage of a bird's life (Plate 206), while a number of passerine species routinely moult all tail feathers simultaneously (Svensson 1992). An aligned fault bar across the tail is therefore *not* conclusive evidence of a juvenile bird and it is my personal opinion that this feature alone should never be used to determine the age of a bird (contra Gillon 2015 [but see below (eds)]).

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Plate 203 (top left). The alternate lighter and darker bands - present on both the juvenile and the moulted adult-type tail feathers of this Great Tit - represent normal daily growth bars. Sweden, November 2012. © *Stephen Menzie*
Plate 204 (top right). A fault bar across the juvenile primaries and secondaries of a second calendar-year Lesser Whitethroat. Note that the pre-breeding moulted tertials and innermost secondary are unaffected by the fault bar, having been grown during a different moult period, Sweden, May 2014. © *Stephen Menzie*

Plate 205 (bottom left). Periods of extreme nutritional stress can prove lethal. Fault bars can become so extreme as to cause a weak point in the feather shaft. The juvenile primaries, secondaries and outermost tertial of this Blackcap have broken along the weak point caused by an extreme fault bar. Note that the post-juvenile moulted tertials and greater coverts are unaffected by the fault bar, as is the juvenile outermost primary (perhaps supporting the 'fault bar allocation hypothesis'). This bird was still present at the same location some weeks later and it's highly unlikely that it was ever able to make the sea crossing to continue on its migration. Sweden, October 2014. © *Stephen Menzie* **Plate 206 (bottom right).** A cautionary tail! This Lesser Whitethroat shows two fault bars, aligned across the entire tail and indicating simultaneous growth of the feather tract; but the tail is surprisingly fresh for the time of year and all feathers are adult-type - this bird has lost its tail and subsequently regrown the entire tail. Thus, the tail offers no clues to the age of this bird. Sweden, May 2014. © *Stephen Menzie*

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Keith Gillon has supplied the following additional information: *"The ringer of the Barra Scarlet Tanager, Mark Oksien, aged this individual as a first-year bird (EURING code 3) on the basis of retained, greyish brown, abraded primary coverts contrasting with newer greater coverts, even growth bars across the tail feathers and its grey eye. This full set of criteria was unfortunately omitted from the article."*

Discussion:
the age of the Lothian Booted Warbler

Several communications have been received on the subject of the ageing of the Torness Booted Warbler in October 2014 following the publication of Andrews & Eden (2015). The bird was aged as an adult in suspended moult, but the possibility of it being a juvenile/first-winter bird has now been aired.

Duncan Irvine (in litt.) has expressed the view that there is insufficient evidence to age the Lothian Booted Warbler as an adult. Indeed, he has suggested that it is more likely to be a juvenile for the following reasons:

a) The colour of the old feathers. Feathers change colour as their surfaces become abraded and bleached, but, if this were an adult bird, he would have expected the unmoulted wing feathers to have been darker and greyer, with less colour contrast and gloss contrast when compared with the three new primaries.

b) The lack of bleaching near the tips of unmoulted primaries. Assuming that the bird is an adult, all of the primaries, when they were fresh the previous year, would have resembled these new ones. It seems unlikely that they would all have become a uniform brown colour. When the wing is folded, primary feathers are largely covered by adjacent ones, so are shaded from sunlight except at their exposed tips. In an adult bird in October, areas of sun-bleaching towards the tips of the longer unmoulted primaries would be expected. There are no bleached tips evident in this Booted Warbler which would be unusual if its old primaries were about a year old.

c) The difference in width between the old and new primaries. At their distal end, where that can easily be seen, the old primaries are also noticeably narrower than the new ones, suggesting that they are juvenile feathers.

d) The relative lengths of the old and new rectrices. The unmoulted outer rectrices are reported to be shorter than the new adult-type ones. Tails of Booted Warblers are fairly square when the feathers are fully grown. This would indicate that the unmoulted feathers were juvenile, as these are usually not as long as new, moulted ones.

e) The shape of the unmoulted central rectrices. The old, central rectrices are pale and narrow as would be expected in a first-year bird.

f) The presence of fault bars on the unmoulted central rectrices. The fault bars are more likely to have been brought about due to a shortage of food before fledging rather than at any later time. If an adult had lost all of its tail feathers accidentally at some time since it last moulted, it would be expected that the replacement feathers would be intermediate in colour between the older wing feathers and the new tail feathers, which they are not. The fault bars would probably have been much less obvious in that scenario.

Magnus Hellström (Ottenby Bird Observatory) (in litt.) says that his thoughts are very similar to Duncan Irvine's and that it is more likely to be a juvenile than an adult (with the caveat that he hasn't handled the bird and can't be 100% certain). He adds that "Ageing of Booted Warbler in the field is often far from easy. Assuming that both age classes occasionally may show a suspended moult prior to the autumn migration (the issue boils down to an assessment of the unmoulted feathers still present. Are these juvenile (c.4 months old) or adult (c.11 months old) feathers that have endured a winter in South Asia, a spring migration, a breeding season and an ongoing autumn migration? I would expect more abrasion and bleaching to the tips of the primaries in an adult individual by October."

Curiously, Magnus also pointed out the record of a similar Booted Warbler seen on Ile d'Ouessant, France on 16–18 October 2004. This was initially accepted by the Comité d'Homologation National (the French equivalent to BBRC) as a first-winter bird (Frémont *et al.* 2006) and then reclassified as an adult (Frémont *et al.* 2007), photographs of the bird having apparently attracted discussion.

Lars Svensson (in litt.) also agrees with Duncan Irvine. He comments that "I would unhesitantly age this bird as a first-winter, [if only] on the presence of juvenile central and outer tail-feathers. These are of poorer quality, rather different shape and paler general colour, acquiring a typical kind of wear rather soon - they wear much quicker and more heavily than adult feathers. I also see a hint of the coarse fault bars on the central rectrices reappearing on the outer retained ones. This is a strong indication of young age. That a young bird has started its wing moult in October is normal. Suspended moult of adults is unknown, and if it happens must be exceptional. Both adults and young are thought to [moult] soon after arrival to winter quarters. It is therefore possible to see this bird as showing a quite normal moult activity, only it taking place in the wrong country. I would agree that it looks as if moult has been suspended on this bird; no feather seems to be missing. But it is difficult to see details and to establish this beyond doubt. Also, vagrants arriving in unfamiliar regions may react abnormally, but of this we know little of course."

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Obituaries

Archie Mathieson (1937–2014)

Archie Mathieson who was East Lothian's and Scotland's first full-time local authority countryside ranger, died in March 2014, aged 77, at Fidra Nursing Home, North Berwick.

He was born in Kilwinning in Ayrshire in 1937. Unlike so many who nowadays take up a career in conservation after a relevant university degree, Archie had several quite different jobs. After two years' national service in Germany with the Royal Tank Regiment, he worked in Ayrshire as a gamekeeper and then as a GPO telephone engineer before moving to East Lothian in 1970. He and Anne, whom he married in Ayrshire in 1964, moved into a cottage close to where Waterston House now is, near Aberlady. The Countryside Scotland Act had made 75% grants available to local authorities to employ countryside rangers and in creating the post East Lothian Council thought 'A mature practical countryman was needed to look after the countryside and help people enjoy it.' He was given an outfit consisting of breeches, a tweed Norfolk jacket and a deerstalker hat along with joiner's tools, scythe, hedge knife, bushman saw, and grappling iron. The main task of a countryside ranger then was ' to patrol the land to which the public has access, to see that they are not breaking the byelaws but more positively to interest them in their surroundings' Nowadays East Lothian has an 11-strong ranger service but Archie covered the entire county and was a familiar figure at places like Aberlady Bay, Yellowcraig, the railway walks and the Lammermuir Hills in his blue Land Rover. He was a great communicator whose passion was to pass on his knowledge and expertise to others, especially school groups, who he knew were the next generation of people who should be looking after the countryside. Observant and curious about every aspect of natural history and geology, he made copious notes as he went about the county, which led to a very popular weekly column in the *East Lothian Courier*. He was often asked to give talks and commented that he doubted if there was a hall in East Lothian he had not spoken in.

Plate 207. Archie Mathieson at Yellowcraig on the East Lothian coast.

Archie was a skilled gardener and his children well remember shelling mountains of peas to be frozen for the coming winter. Another aspect of his self-sufficiency was replenishing his store of firewood which he took pride in sawing by hand - "It warms you twice, first in the cutting and again in the burning." He also enjoyed photography and fishing and kept meticulous weather notes over many years. After retirement in 1990 he took up the craft of stick dressing, while he was also a talented watercolour artist and toy maker.

He is survived by wife Ann, children Scot, Esther and Bruce and grandchildren Callum, Fergus, Eva and Lily.

Peter Gordon

Elizabeth Munro Smith (1922–2015)

Plate 208. Betty Smith (right) with Mandy, Woodhall Dean, Lothian, c.2002. © *Lesley Fairweather*

Betty Smith died peacefully in June 2015 in her 94th year. She was a dedicated teacher, distinguished naturalist, dedicated conservationist, loving wife and mother. Born Elizabeth Munro Gall on 27 February 1922 in St Vincent Street, Stockbridge Edinburgh she had a very happy childhood, never more so than when she went with her mother to the nearby Botanic Garden. She listened intently as her mum reeled off all the names of the flowers. Her auntie was a keen botanist too, which helped lay the foundations for Betty's own future interests in the natural world.

She attended James Gillespie's High School for Girls. She loved reading and classical music, excelled in science and was captain of the school swimming team. Betty was a keen youth hosteller and was a member of the Scottish Youth Hostel Association into her 80s. She studied science at Edinburgh University, followed by teacher training at Moray House. Her first teaching post was in Buckie, Aberdeenshire during the war where she taught biology. She spent a lot of her spare time wandering the countryside alone, which led her to being accosted by the local bobby who thought she was a German spy. After the war, she returned to Edinburgh to teach at Gillespie's and on a part time basis to teach biology to trainee nurses.

Betty met her future husband and soul-mate Bob Smith on a trip to Iceland in the late 1950s. They married in 1963 and set up home at 33 Hunter Terrace Loanhead, an address that was in *Scottish Birds* for many years as Bob was recorder for Midlothian as well as the Forth islands. Fascinated by all wildlife, Betty shared Bob's passion for birdwatching, participating for many years in the annual census of seabirds on the islands. Insects though were never far away from Betty's thoughts and she was soon studying bumblebees. Her interest in dragonflies was ignited when a friend captured a couple and brought them to Betty and Bob in a shoe box as he didn't know what they were. She realized that dragonflies made excellent subjects for study during the summer months when the work with birds was at its least demanding. She and Bob made many fieldtrips throughout Scotland and beyond. Her work on these insects made a valuable contribution to knowledge in this field including several papers. She served for many years as the regional recorder for dragonflies in Scotland.

She was a long term supporter of the Edinburgh Natural History Society, serving on its council and a term as president. She was always passionate about conservation, a passion put to practical effect in her involvement with the organizing committees of several Lothian nature reserves, notably as convener at Milkhall Pond near Penicuik.

Family life was important. Her daughter Mandy fondly remembers her mum spending hours making costumes for Halloween parties and Gala day parades. In fact Betty, along with her sister Marie, was responsible one year for creating all the outfits for the majorettes at the Loanhead Gala. They also spent many adventurous camping holidays with Mandy in the wilds of Scotland, joined on occasions by their close friends Sally and Lance Vick and their three children.

Betty and Bob revelled in retirement. They purchased a camper van and ventured all over Scotland, UK and Europe. They photographed and recorded all sightings of dragonflies. They also enjoyed many trips further afield to visit countries in South America, Africa and Australia where on a boat trip the diminutive Betty dived into the sea to swim alongside giant Manta Rays. They were almost arrested in Sri Lanka by undercover policemen who thought they were going to smuggle rare species of dragonfly out of the country. While travelling in the Gambia the pair were robbed at knifepoint, Bob having his wallet and watch taken. The thieves didn't realize that all good Scotswomen are in charge of the purse strings and Betty had the bulk of their money secure in a money belt under her shirt.

Betty was now approaching her 80th birthday, but continued to travel all over Scotland in her camper van, propping herself up on the driver's seat with three cushions. She went on numerous excursions: to Bulgaria with the British Dragonfly Society, another to South Africa and one to Fair Isle with the SOC. Betty made her final trip abroad at the age of 87, accompanied by close friend and fellow naturalist Mo Richards. They visited Costa Rica, where she enjoyed a high-wire descent through the rainforest canopy, her tiny frame suspended by a hook, 200 m above the forest floor.

In 2007, she moved to a small flat. Having got rid of her cherished camper van, she bought a small Nissan Micra and continued to explore the countryside. She also took up art, drawing and painting many wildlife pictures. She reluctantly handed over the car keys at the age of 88 on condition that family members would drive her to local wildlife sites.

Betty was a keen supporter of worthwhile causes and charities both human and animal. Latterly she supported the Five Sisters Zoo in West Lothian in their attempts to rescue ex-circus animals. On our last trip there Betty was taken behind the scenes to get up close to three Brown Bears. We spent half an hour happily ladling spoonfuls of honey into the grateful bears' mouths.

She will be lovingly remembered by all who were greeted by her warm and cheery smile. Whenever I presented a common hawker onto Betty's palm she would look the wee beast in the eye and say with childlike wonder "Hello beautiful". I'm sure if they could talk back they would have happily returned the compliment.

Drew McLean

John Philip Busby (1928–2015)

Whilst at school in the mid-1980s, I purchased a book that was to change my life. It was the first edition of *Drawing Birds, an RSPB Guide*, by John Busby, and it led me into a whole new way of seeing and expression as a visual artist. John was a pioneer of working direct from life and he had that exceptionally rare talent of making the most difficult seem easy. His drawings flowed with life and character, his birds and animals deftly flew and skipped across the page with a movement seldom achieved before. His landscapes and rock pools invited you in to explore and discover, with beautiful balances and harmonies of colour - reflections on the natural world. Only the best of artists can lure you in to see and feel this way.

In 1988 he started an annual, week-long Seabird Drawing Course, based on the East Lothian coast, which still continues to this day. It was on this course that I first met John. I remember driving from college in Wales, and introducing myself to John on the steps of the Blenheim Hotel in North Berwick. I was instantly met with a warmth from possibly the most generous person I have ever met. Coming from college I was exploding with a will to try and paint what I saw, but until that week unable to channel a direction. It was this supportive encouragement that stayed throughout the 20 years plus I was lucky enough to know John, and have him as a special friend. The course has seen hundreds of

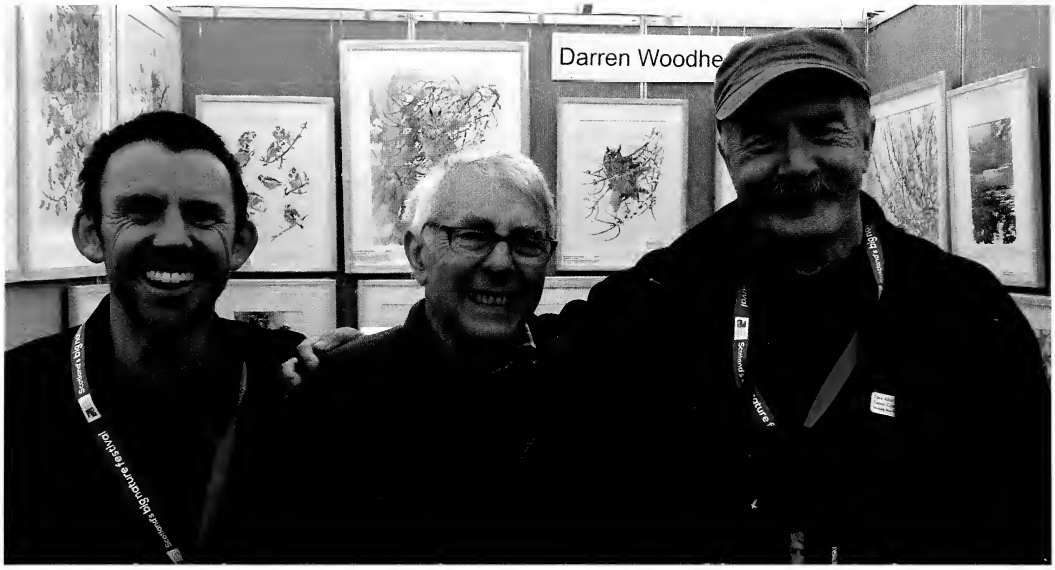


Plate 209. John Busby (centre) with Darren Woodhead and Dave Allan, Scottish Birdfair, Musselburgh, May 2015. © *SOC*

participants from many parts of the world, all shown ways of depicting the most challenging of subjects - whirling seabirds against spectacular towering cliffs. With the aid of the maestro, all this became possible.

John was born in Bradford in 1928, before the family moved to Menston, a village in the heart of Wharfedale, where his passion and love of the outdoors blossomed. He attended Ilkley Grammar School and followed his love and talent for drawing and painting, leading him to study at both Leeds and Edinburgh Colleges of Art - though first he completed two years of National Service in the RAF.

At the end of his studies and a postgraduate travelling scholarship, John was offered a teaching post at Edinburgh College of Art, which he enjoyed from 1956 to 1988. He was a natural teacher, with a never ending patience and generosity and the ability to lift the room, in his quiet and unassuming way. John also chaired the committee that ran the 57 Gallery in George Street, Edinburgh, was President of the Society of Scottish Artists 1973–75, member of the Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Watercolour, and of the Royal Scottish Academy. He was a founder member of the Society of Wildlife Artists, and a key member of the Artists for Nature Foundation. In 2009 he was declared 'Master Wildlife Artist' by the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum, in Wisconsin, USA. He exhibited widely in both his adopted Scotland and his native England with solo exhibitions in Edinburgh, Lavenham and Dumfries, as well as a major retrospective at Bradford City Art Gallery in 1999.

How poignant it is that as I write, we have just learned of the passing one of John's great friends, the naturalist Bryan Nelson. It was this friendship that extended John's career into illustrating many books, including *Birds in Mallorca* (1988). Of his own books the first, published in 1982, was *The Living Birds of Eric Ennion*, This was John's tribute to an artist he much admired and whose approach, through meeting in Northumberland in the early 1950s, had been a revelation of what was possible in the difficult art of portraying birds. More books followed: *Nature Drawings* (1983), the influential *Drawing Birds* (1986, 2004), *Land Marks and Sea Wings* (2005) and *Looking at Birds - an antidote to field guides* (2013). His final book, *Lines in Nature*, will be published by Langford Press later this year.

He was a committed Christian and classical music was another love. It was while singing in the Edinburgh University Singers that he met a young mezzo-soprano called Joan. They

married in 1959, had three children: Philip, Rachel and Sarah, and nine grandchildren.

In 1981, John wrote "I must say it is enjoyable to have commissions, though important to work on paintings for their own sake in order to make discoveries beyond oneself. Trying to externalise experiences by painting, writing, etc. helps to understand them and to be more receptive. Being receptive and willing to change and grow makes one most alive I think - more vulnerable to both pain and joy."

Humour and his gentle way is my abiding memory of John. The times we sat beside each other such as on the Bass Rock, when a chuckle would erupt, followed by a hmmm; it would be John, having seen immature Gannets pulling at each other's tails whilst hanging in the wind , rapidly and magically drawing the action with ease. I recall, too, struggling to make sense of a New Forest landscape whilst on a Society of Wildlife Artists Project, whilst John drew remarkable tree animals, the animals the gnarled ancient branch shapes created, a Conger Eel, a strange seahorse type creature; that's what John did, he saw, where others could not.

John was an artist who taught many to see, and with a wit and humour as gentle as his palette of rock pool greys. He was the mentor who would waddle around the room trying to live the character of a penguin, he was a genius, a presence, an inspiration and a vision with a rare ability to connect that will stay with us forever. He will be hugely missed but few artists will leave such a legacy. We had a beautiful afternoon together recently, when he visited the house and thoroughly enjoyed looking at my recent paintings of Long-eared Owls, Fieldfares and Redwing. He relished just as much another's fortune at seeing something special. That was John. We shared so many memorable times, including hanging many exhibitions together at Waterston House, with our close friend Dave Allan. His ideas were instinctive, creative and he just saw what would work and would not, viewing colours and rhythm with a sharpness that constantly left me aghast.

A very special retrospective exhibition is planned at The Royal Scottish Academy, Edinburgh during late autumn 2015, with a further exhibition at The Scottish Gallery, Edinburgh in spring 2016.

Darren Woodhead

Plate 210. Gannets on the Bass (oil). © *John Busby*

J. Bryan Nelson (1932–2015)

The gannetry on the Bass Rock is widely acclaimed as one of the wildlife wonders of the world and a jewel in Scotland's ornithological crown. Bryan Nelson, who died on 29 June aged 83, was inextricably linked to the Bass and its Gannets through his lifelong work on the behaviour of this spectacular seabird in its equally spectacular surroundings.

Bryan was born in Shipley, in the West Riding of Yorkshire (now West Yorkshire) on 14 March 1932. From an early age he was enthralled by wildlife, particularly birds, spending all his spare time wandering around the woods, moors and reservoirs near his home. During his teens his observations were sharpened by the acquisition of his first pair of binoculars and his

horizons widened with trips to seabird islands including Ailsa Craig, the Farne Islands and the Treshnish Isles. He attended Saltaire Grammar School, where predictably his favourite subjects were Biology and English. However, he had to leave school at 16 to help support his family by working as an analytical chemist at the sewage treatment works at Esholt, just outside Bradford. Although the plant was state of the art and probably offered a much more secure and well paid career path than the one Bryan would ultimately take, it was clear that birds were always at the forefront of his mind. Thus, even in the confines of the laboratory he managed to rig up a drop-trap enabling him to ring birds in his tea and lunch breaks. These brief interludes of 'recreational ringing' must have been high spots in an otherwise work-dominated life, because in the evenings he attended night school to complete his secondary education. However, Bryan's determination and hard work paid dividends and he obtained a scholarship that brought him north of the border to the University of St Andrews. As Bryan recalls in *On the Rocks* (2013), St Andrews gave him four memorable years and an excellent grounding in many aspects of zoology, culminating in a first class honours degree. However, no one in the zoology department had the faintest interest in field studies of animal behaviour; Bryan knew that this was the research area he wanted to specialise in and achieving this aim would require another move, this time to Oxford for a DPhil.

Initially, Bryan was based in the Edward Grey Institute with David Lack, but found his project on Blackbirds in the Botanic Gardens too tame. Fortuitously his honours thesis on Crested Newts persuaded Niko Tinbergen to let Bryan join his prestigious Behaviour Group to study Gannets. Sir Hew Dalrymple gave permission for the work to be carried out on the Bass Rock in the Firth of Forth and so began a study that would endure for the rest of Bryan's life. Another momentous event occurred at this time with his marriage to June (née Davison) on 30 December 1960. Her spirit of adventure matched his and without her Bryan would undoubtedly have been far less productive, since for the next half-century she not only provided unstinting help in the field, but also typed the seemingly endless stream of hand-written manuscripts documenting his findings.

The Gannet has the longest breeding season of any UK seabird. In his autobiography Richard Dawkins, who was also doing a DPhil in Oxford in the early 1960s, remembers that for most of the year there was a notice on Bryan's office door informing people that 'Nelson is on the Bass'! However, despite spending so much time

Plate 211. Bryan Nelson (right) with John Busby, North Berwick, Lothian, June 2012. © *Hallgeir B Skjelstad*

in the field, Bryan wrote up in record time and having documented the behaviour and ecology of the Gannet set his sights on doing the same for the other members of the Sulidae. Achieving this aim occupied Bryan and June for the next 10 years, taking them to many exotic, but logistically challenging, locations in the Galapagos Islands, the guano islands of Peru, Christmas Island in the Indian Ocean and New Zealand. Papers and books soon appeared, including the widely acclaimed *Galapagos: Islands of Birds* in 1968. 1978 was particularly productive, with the mammoth 1,050-page monograph on *The Sulidae: Gannets and Boobies* published for the University of Aberdeen by Oxford University Press and *The Gannet* published by T. & A.D. Poyser. Later came *The Biology and Ecology of Seabirds* (1980), *Living with Seabirds* (1986), *The Atlantic Gannet* (1988), *Pelicans, Cormorants and their relatives* (2008) and *On the Rocks* (2013). Most of these were enhanced and enlivened by Bryan's photographs and the highly distinctive artwork of his life-long friend John Busby, who died just weeks before Bryan bringing to an end one of the most successful author-illustrator partnerships in recent times.

Like his study species, Bryan had a long 'prospecting phase', in his case on a truly global scale. However, in 1969 was 'recruited' into the Zoology Department at Aberdeen University, subsequently becoming a Reader. By then he was the world authority on the Sulidae giving superbly illustrated and amusingly animated lectures to undergraduates and conference goers alike. If you were a zoology student with an interest in birds in the 1970s, Aberdeen University was one of the most exciting places to be and Bryan's research on the evolution of displays in gannets and boobies was one of the main reasons for Aberdeen's popularity.

As well as his academic work, Bryan was deeply committed to conservation. The achievement that undoubtedly gave him greatest satisfaction was the key role his research and tireless advocacy played in persuading the Australian government to create a National Park on Christmas Island (an Australian territory in the Indian Ocean), thereby safeguarding the only breeding location of the canopy-nesting Abbott's Booby from clear felling to allow phosphate mining. Bryan was also involved in Scottish conservation, notably the RSPB's successful campaign against the Loch of Strathbeg being the site where pipelines from the rapidly expanding North Sea gas industry came ashore.

Bryan officially retired from academia in 1982, exchanging Quilquox, a granite croft in the wilds of Aberdeenshire, for equally characterful homes in Dumfries and Galloway. 'Retirement' gave him more time to write, although for the first few years he continued to give lecture courses at Aberdeen. He also played a major role in the development of the Scottish Seabird Centre at North Berwick, where visitors can now watch Gannets on the Bass Rock in comfort via a webcam - a far cry from the harsh conditions experienced by the Nelsons in the 1960s.

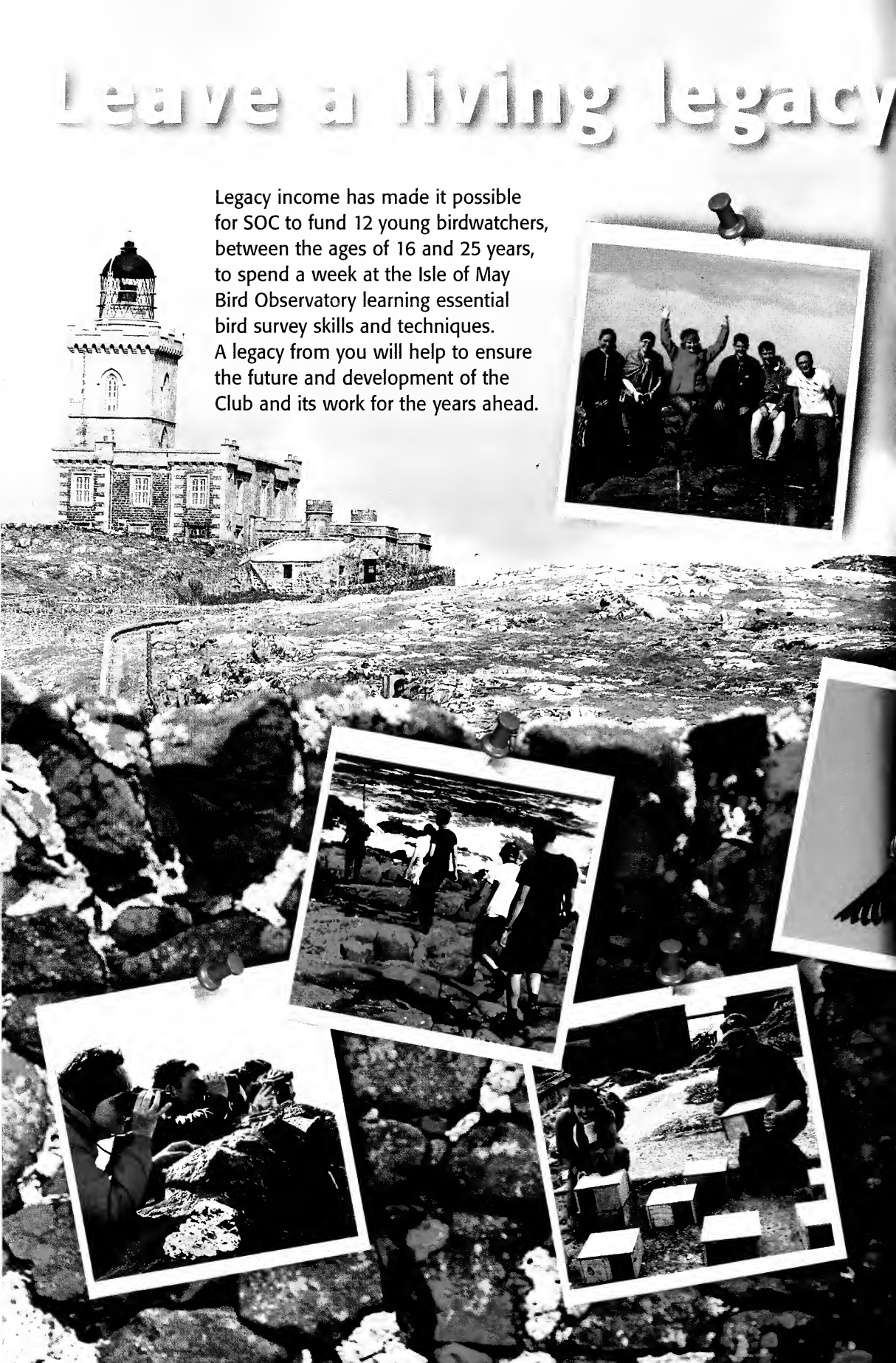
Bryan was a long term member and supporter of the SOC. When he retired in 1985, he and June moved down to a house by Loch Ken, a few miles south of New Galloway. The Stewartry branch persuaded him to become their chairman even before he became a committee member. Bryan was Stewartry Chairman for seven sessions from 1985/86 to 1991/92 inclusive and Branch Representative on Council for four of these. When he retired as Chairman, Bryan acted as Vice-chairman for one year and was a committee member for a further four, before kindly helping out by becoming Chairman for his eighth term in 1997/98. During his 30 years as a member of the New Galloway/Stewartry branch, he stood in on occasions when a speaker had to cancel, gave short presentations several times at members' nights and led a number of excursions. He was also on the editorial board of *Scottish Birds* for many years.

Bryan was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1982 and awarded an MBE for his services to seabird conservation in 2006. He is survived by June, their twins, Becky and Simon and two grandchildren.

Sarah Wanless

Leave a living legacy

Legacy income has made it possible for SOC to fund 12 young birdwatchers, between the ages of 16 and 25 years, to spend a week at the Isle of May Bird Observatory learning essential bird survey skills and techniques. A legacy from you will help to ensure the future and development of the Club and its work for the years ahead.

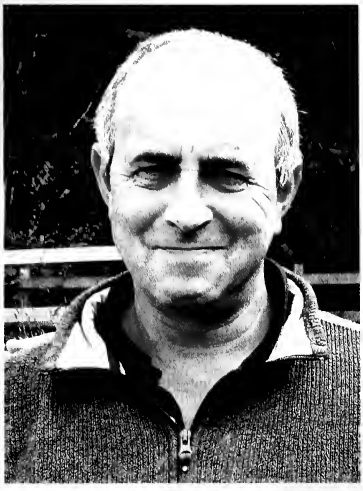


"I joined the SOC as a 13-year-old with a keen interest in birds. Branch outings, indoor meetings and the friendship and experience of fellow members furthered my fledgling birding education and caught my attention to such an extent that it made my subsequent choice of a career in nature conservation an easy one.

Now, just a few decades later, young people today have a lot more choices, with the world seemingly a much smaller place and with a range of competing attractions and interests accessible at the click of a mouse or the touch of a screen.

Being able to fund formal training for young birders is a fantastic opportunity for the SOC to ensure that in the years to come, there will be another generation of birders recording, conserving and speaking up for Scotland's birds".

Ian Thomson, SOC Vice-President



If you would like to find out more about remembering the SOC in your Will, including leaving a bequest of books to the Club, please contact Jane on 01875 871 330 or visit our website at www.the-soc.org.uk/leaving-a-legacy-to-the-soc/

The Club has benefitted greatly from past members who have left the SOC a legacy. These gifts have proved invaluable in furthering the Club's aims and objectives.

Plate 212. Waterston House official opening by Magnus Magnusson (foreground), October 2005. © *Ian Andrews*

Waterston House is ten years old

The Club's new headquarters were officially opened on 1 October 2005 though we had been in the building from 1 July. A full account is in *Scottish Bird News* no. 78 (December 2005). Over the ten years there have been many references to the building and activities that have taken place within it or from it. What we do here is draw these together to provide a summary of how our new building has helped the SOC. A main aim of the move was to create a building that would continue to service the SOC, but also take the Club forward without losing sight of its original objectives. Membership had fallen to a dip below 2,000 in 2001–02. As this is written in July 2015, we have over 3,000 members, our highest membership yet. A glance at the relevant section of *Scottish Birds* shows that the highest number of new members has been in Lothian. However, the SOC exists to advance our knowledge and enjoyment of birds throughout all of Scotland.

How has the new building helped the SOC? Meetings of the Management Committee, who have the responsibility for Waterston House, and other groups take place, but that is not new. We still have the best ornithological library in Scotland; preserving the library was one of the biggest tasks when the Club moved out of Regent Terrace. The library was used extensively during the writing period of *The Birds of Scotland* by species accounts authors. The archives were also used by Derek Niemann, author of *Birds in a Cage*. The library continues to deal with frequent requests for information, often involving our archives, from authors and researchers. We now provide a better service as there is more space, online searchable catalogues, a more attractive setting and also a children's corner. As we begin to scan archive material it will become even more accessible.

The Lothian SOC Discussion Group still meets from September through to April with the focus still very much on organising fieldwork. This may be BTO or SOC national surveys but the enthusiasm of the group has led to extra initiatives, notably local bird atlases covering south-east Scotland in more detail than the national versions. The Lothian branch has two winter lectures at Aberlady. Interestingly, around half of those who attend do not make the Edinburgh talks, suggesting we are better able to cater for those members who do not want to travel into the city.

Volunteers

The Club has always relied on a small staff greatly supplemented by a larger number of volunteers. Currently we have two full-time and four part-time staff. Around 20 volunteers come in most weeks to help with various aspects of the Club. Here we begin to see the benefits of the new site. It is more attractive for people to visit and work in. Volunteers can combine a session at Waterston House with some wildlife viewing on the East Lothian coast. We now have a garden group whose work greatly enhances the look of the place. Volunteers help with library, sales, greet the public, deal with enquiries and upgrade the computers. As a small thank you for all their hard work, staff organise the Waterston House volunteers' Christmas party which caters for around 60 people who have helped in one way or another over the preceding year.

Visitors and advice

The combination of an interesting and eco-friendly building set in attractive and wildlife-friendly grounds on the main coast road all brings in many more visitors than we had at Regent Terrace. So far, 60 species of birds have been recorded in the grounds. Being open daily all year round apart from a week or so over the Christmas/New Year period means that Waterston House is now very firmly on the eco visitor's map of East Lothian

Plate 213. Some of the Waterston House volunteers and staff (left to right): James & Doreen Main, John Pringle, Wendy Hicks and Sid Morgan, May 2009. © *Doreen Main*

Plate 214. A Birdwatching for Beginners course, Gosford Bay, Lothian, August 2012. © *SOC*

Visitors can look at optics and browse our selection of second-hand books, field guides, greetings cards, artists' prints, mugs, wooden bird carvings, new books (on birds/art/natural history), bird reports and atlases, bird feeders and bird food. We source good quality bird food from Vine House Farm, which grows most of its own seed and has strong environmental credentials.

We have tea/coffee available and of course free advice. Enquiries both from visitors and over the phone or via email include bird ID, advice on injured birds, sightings, where to watch birds in Scotland (often from overseas visitors coming to do birding trips in Scotland, sometimes seeking a guide), environmental consultancy data and scoping requests, press enquiries about rare sightings or controversial developments etc. There are approximately 10,000 visits to the building per year though many of these will be repeat visits.

We welcome visitors from all over the world. Many come from the continent, some by ferry to Newcastle taking the scenic route to Edinburgh. Most visitors are from the UK with many from south of the border. Not all are birders; walkers doing the John Muir Way or cyclists looking for a nice spot for a rest, call by. We get quite a number of architectural students keen to see at first hand the building's innovative design.

Several branches and many individual members now combine a day's birding on the local coast with a look in to Waterston House where they can be assured of a warm welcome.

Special events

We are able to run special events, often linked to our mainstream activities. We run optics demo days in spring and autumn, book launches such as *Birds and People* (Mark Cocker) or *Otters* (Laurie Campbell and Anna Levin) or *Looking at Birds* (John Busby), artists' demos, talks and workshops for example by Carol Barrett and Lisa Hooper, photography workshops by Laurie Campbell. Dave Allan and Keith MacGregor lead a series of four Birding for Beginners' walks over the year. Indoor talks with sound on birdsong by Stan da Prato have linked to dawn chorus walks in nearby woods returning to HQ for a welcome

cuppa and breakfast buttie! Later in the year, our Autumn Goose Watch is held in early October ably led by John Harrison (Aberlady Bay LNR warden). His illustrated talk followed by watching thousands of geese coming in to roost is a very popular format. We have hosted a wedding and repainted the walls blue to pretend to be Fair Isle Bird Observatory as a film set for Ann Cleeves' Shetland-based crime story *Blue Lightning* with Douglas Henshall and Bill Paterson. We marked the 75th anniversary of the SOC by inviting Chris Packham, who talked in Edinburgh, but also visited Waterston House. David Lindo, the Urban Birder, looked in after taking part in Scotland's Big Nature Festival (aka 'The Scottish Birdfair') at Musselburgh this spring and recommended the site to his followers. This summer we marked ten years in Waterston House outdoors with a summer garden event in June, including garden tours and talks.

Wildlife art

One feature of Waterston House that was never fully anticipated when the building was being planned was just how successful it would be as a wildlife art gallery. Again the design of the building has helped. The good but diffused natural light allows paintings and other art or craft work to be displayed to their best advantage. Exhibitions have run continuously since 2005 and the gallery is booked for two years ahead. Distinguished wildlife artists such as the late John Busby, Keith Brockie, Chris Rose and Darren Woodhead have commented favourably on the venue. By the end of this year, we will have hosted 64 exhibitions.

Plate 216. Dave Allan hanging artwork in the Donald Watson Gallery, Waterston House, Aberlady, July 2015. © *Jane Cleaver*

Plate 215. Preview evening for a Darren Woodhead art exhibition, Waterston House, Aberlady, November 2013. © *Ian Andrews*

Community links

We value our links with the local community and try to contribute to village and East Lothian life. The Aberlady Craft Group hires our gallery once per week. Aberlady Primary School children have visited over the years. We support Aberlady Gala with a raffle prize donation as well as an advert in the programme. When the village gardens run an open day for charity under the Scotland's Garden scheme we take part. The peaceful ambience of Waterston House and its garden mean it is regularly visited by several care homes whose residents appreciate the easy access for wheelchairs.

Twice a year we host the meetings of the Aberlady Bay Local Nature Reserve Advisory Group, which advises East Lothian Council on the management of the oldest local nature reserve in the country.

Public relations

We enjoy good support from the two local newspapers who always print any press releases we send (e.g. advertising upcoming art exhibitions). We produce professional-looking colour posters of all our events and have a hit list of places in Edinburgh and East Lothian that we either hand deliver via volunteers or email. Social media plays a big part. Visitors to the centre can sign up to receive notifications, via our Contacts Form, of upcoming events, art exhibitions, guided walks, volunteering and membership. This year, we have invested in regular advertising in the national art magazine, *Artmag*, and have already seen enquiries come in from this.

How well has the building performed?

Many of these activities help the Club financially. In 2013–14 sales income reached a high of £55,000 of which commission from art sales made the biggest contribution at around £36,000. This compares to £93,000 from subscriptions, also a new high. Second in value is commission from optical equipment sales. Second-hand book sales income last year brought in just over £8,000 and as these are donated or surplus items, no outlay is involved. Further contributions come from bird food and feeders, while walks bring in c. £1,000 as well as their value in recruiting new members. All this has allowed SOC to expand the range and quality of what we provide for our members.

Plate 217. The Club's Library Committee meets in Waterston House, April 2015. © *SOC*

The glossy journal you are now reading is one example. Increased revenue has also allowed us to re-design the SOC website and continue employing a Development Officer.

The building was designed to keep running costs down. To improve this even further, solar panels were installed in 2009. One unforeseen drawback of the design has been its attractiveness to Feral Pigeons which roost and nest on the exterior wood frame. The 200 Club, which Daphne Peirse-Duncombe started in Regent Terrace, continues to help with our infrastructure. 200 Club income helped to furnish the premises with furniture, fittings, computers, printers and paid for interpretation enhancements such as chalkboard signs in the wildlife garden etc. The 200 Club is explained in every March issue of *Scottish Birds* as that is when the new forms are circulated to members.

Our new building has helped us increase our membership and our income. We feel we have better connectivity with members and a stronger and more distinct public profile. Together these help us continue to fulfil the aims set out by the Club's founders in 1936 which we nowadays summarise as *Watching Over Scotland's Birds*.

Compiled by Stan da Prato, assisted by staff and volunteers at Waterston House

More information can be found on our website and in annual reports. *Scottish Birds* 34(3) has an article on birds seen in and over the garden.

NEWS AND NOTICES

New Members

Ayrshire: Mr J. Black, Mr K. Stewart, **Caithness:** Mr R. Matthews, **Central Scotland:** Mr L. Kerr, Mr T. Palmer, Mr O. Selly, **Clyde:** Mr J. Hughes, Mr S. Kane, Mr M. Sinclair, **Dumfries:** Mr G. Crow, **England, Wales & NI:** Mr & Mrs P. Noble, **Fife:** Mrs R. Goodman, Mr I. Parkinson, Mr & Mrs D. Wilson, **Highland:** Dr M. Hems, Mr W. Ryder & Ms L. Gibbons, Mr R. Taylor, **Lothian:** Mr D.S. Adams, Mr W.R. Bartle, Mr J. Beckett, Mr D. Bennie, Mrs J. Berg, Miss A. Broadhurst, Mr S. Cairns, Ms W. Carr, Mr A. Chapman, Ms K. Cruickshank, Mr M. Fallon, Mr J.W. Finlayson, Mr H. French, Mr R. Giles, Mr A. Hardie, Mr & Mrs J. Hopkins, Mr P. Hunsley, Mr & Mrs M. Jackson, Mr N.E. Kannemeyer, Mr G. Laing, Mr & Mrs D.R. MacLeod, Mr L. McFadzean, Ms R. Parkyn, Mr N. Pye, Mr C. Richards, Mr & Mrs R.A. Ross, Mr & Mrs W. Rowley, Ms S. Sedgwick, Ms J. Souness, Mr & Mrs P. Sumerling, Mr & Mrs C. Watt, Ms J. Williams, Mr S. Wilson, Ms P. Wilson & Ms P. Denholm, **Moray:** Dr V. Leith, **North-East Scotland:** Mr I. Bell, Mr J. Huthwaite, Mr R. & Dr M. Masson, **Overseas:** Mr R. Robb, **Scotland - no branch:** Mr N. Brown, Mr J.L. Irvine, Dr W. Welstead, **Stewartry:** Mr D. Farr, **Tayside:** Mr R. Key, Mr M.A. Sedakat, **West Galloway:** Mr N. Booth.

200 Club

The latest prize winners are: **May**: **1st** £30 Alison Duncan, **2nd** £20 Prof. Slater, **3rd** £10 Jimmy Maxwell. **June**: **1st** £30 Dr H. Hissett, **2nd** £20 David Clugston, **3rd** £10 Prof. Slater. **July**: **1st** £30 Mrs S. Cartwright, **2nd** £20 Miss Lapthorne, **3rd** £10 Alison Duncan. Details on how to join can be obtained by writing to Daphne Peirse-Duncombe at Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose TD6 9NH.

Conferences

SOC Annual Conference & AGM, 30 October–1 November 2015, Atholl Palace Hotel, Pitlochry. This year's theme is the impact of land management on Scotland's uplands birds. For full programme details and to book, visit www.the-soc.org.uk/the-2015-annual-conference/ The minutes of last year's AGM and the agenda for this year's meeting can be found in the enclosed copy of the SOC Annual Report.

Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference, Saturday 19 March 2016, Eastgate Theatre, Peebles. Programme and booking form will be circulated with the December issue of *Scottish Birds*.

Branch Updates

North-East Scotland, new branch secretary: John Wills, Bilbo, Monymusk, Inverurie AB51 7HA, Tel: 01467 651296, Email: grampian.secretary @the-soc.org.uk John takes up the reins of secretary once again, replacing Hugh Addlesee. Council wishes to thank Hugh for his commitment to the role of branch secretary for the past three years.

For full details of branch committee members and local recorders, please visit the relevant branch page on the SOC website.

Waterston House

Christmas/New Year closing: Waterston House will be closed during the festive period, from 25 December 2015 to 1 January 2016 inclusive.

Aberlady Goose Watch

Illustrated talk. Thursday 1 October & Tuesday 6 October 2015, 5.30 pm, £4.00 (£6.00 non-members) - by popular demand, John Harrison, warden of Aberlady Bay Local Nature Reserve (East Lothian Council), returns to entertain audiences with some fascinating insights into the migrating geese that arrive in East Lothian in their thousands each autumn. The talk is followed by the opportunity to watch the spectacle of the geese flying in to roost on the reserve. Refreshments served. Places limited. Advance booking essential.

Guided walk. Saturday 3 October 2015, 7.00 am, £4.00 (£6.00 non-members) - a chance to enjoy watching the geese at close quarters as they leave their roosting site at Aberlady bay to head off to feed in the surrounding farmland. The walk will be at a leisurely pace, led by John Harrison (see above), and will last around an hour and a half, returning to Waterston House for tea/coffee and a breakfast roll. Places limited. Advance booking essential.

Optics Demo Day

Sunday 11 October 2015, 10 am–4 pm. A wide range of binoculars and telescopes to try out in field conditions. Or pop in for some free friendly advice! If there are any models that you are particularly interested in looking at, please let us know and we will do our best to order these in for the event.

Art exhibitions

Keith Brockie, 12 September to 4 November 2015
Darren Woodhead, 7 November 2015 to 13 January 2016

Waterston House 10th Anniversary - commemorative Timbergram

October 2015 marks ten years since SOC HQ was officially opened (see pages 236–240) and to mark the milestone, we have introduced a Waterston House Timbergram™.

Reminiscent of the original wooden postcards of the early 1900s, the Timbergram makes for a novel way to send greetings in the post or serves as an attractive keepsake for visitors. Featuring an image of Waterston House on the front, the Timbergram echoes the wooden foundations of the building. The product is made in the UK with sustainably-sourced and FSC-certified wood from forests in East Europe. They can be written on with a biro pen and are posted just like a standard postcard.

This special Club-customised Timbergram is now available to purchase from Waterston House priced £3.95 (plus £1.00 p&p within UK. Please contact us for overseas or bulk orders as postage charges will vary).

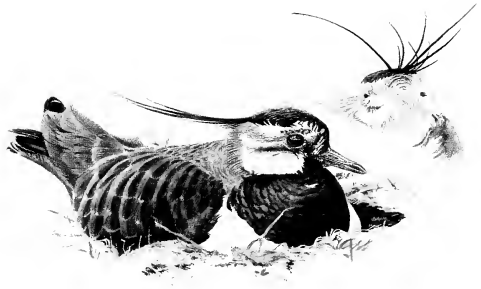


Plate 218. Lapwing. © *Keith Brockie*

Plate 219. Long-eared Owl. © *Darren Woodhead*

Scottish Bird News - proposed digitisation

From 1986 to 2009 *Scottish Bird News* ran for 91 issues and included all manner of articles and Club news from headquarters and the branches. It is an important record of the Club's activities over that period and we would now like to make that record more widely available through the Biodiversity Heritage Library. The BHL www.biodiversitylibrary.org, whose main partners in the UK are the Natural History Museum and the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, has become the world's main free archive of digitised natural history literature, and has established itself as a leading online research library. If you don't already know it, you should have a look - it offers free access to a vast amount of historical books and journals, including the *Scottish Naturalist* and the *Annals of Scottish Natural History* through to 1922, the *Proceedings of the Glasgow Natural History Society,* rare books by Pennant, Harvie-Brown, MacGillivray and much more. By adding *Scottish Bird News* to the BHL we hope this will allow more people around the world to find and read our past newsletters.

SOC Council has endorsed this proposal, but authors, photographers and artists originally submitted their articles and other material to *Scottish Bird News* for print publication, mostly before the idea of digital access came along. It is now impracticable or impossible to trace all the individual contributors or their legal representatives but we believe that most or all would be happy to see their work now reaching new and wider audiences to the overall benefit of Scottish natural history. If any copyright holder does not wish to have their material included in free digital access, they are asked to contact mail@the-soc.org.uk to discuss this with us as soon as possible, preferably before 1 December 2015. Arrangements are in place to have material excluded from web access where necessary.

Orkney Bird Report for 2014

The latest *Orkney Bird Report* has recently been published, with a beautiful Woodchat Shrike cover painting by SWLA award-winning artist Tim Wootton. 254 species recorded in the year, with almost half of them illustrated by colour photos throughout, including superb photos of Yellow-rumped Warbler, Eyebrowed Thrush and Bufflehead. Five new species for the county including Red-breasted Goose, Iberian Chiffchaff and Black-billed Cuckoo. £8 + postage from Jim Williams - jim.geniefea@btinternet.com

Red Grouse on St Kilda

The editorial comments following the record of the first Red Grouse on the Isle of May (*Scottish Birds* 35(2): 187) mention vagrancy to other islands, including two Welsh islands. Two records of Red Grouse for the much more distant St Kilda seem particularly worth noting. The first was on 5 December 1959 (*Scottish Birds* 1: 329) and the second is in Stuart Murray's *Birds of St Kilda* (*Scottish Birds* 23 Supplement: 22) on 21 July 1970.

Estlin Waters

The Musselburgh Bee-eater

The corpse of the female Bee-eater from the 1920 breeding attempt (*Scottish Birds* 35(2): 151–153) is held at National Museums Scotland, Edinburgh (NMSZ 1920.104).

Award for Ian Darling

In the Queen's Birthday Honours List for 2015, Ian Darling was awarded the OBE (Officer of the Order of the British Empire) "for voluntary service to the conservation of wild birds and land management in Scotland." This is not only a very well deserved tribute to Ian, but also recognition of the contribution which volunteers can make to the study and conservation of birds in Scotland.

Ian has played a major role in the work of the SOC, notably as President from 1996 to 1999. He has also served on the Council of the BTO. For seven years he was on the Scottish Committee of the RSPB before becoming a Trustee in 2000. He was Chairman of the RSPB's Conservation Committee for five years, and from 2008 to 2010 he was the Chairman of the RSPB. As a chartered surveyor and a keen birdwatcher, Ian was particularly well equipped for this important role at the top of the largest wildlife conservation charity in Europe.

Ian is a keen ringer, and for a long period has been involved with the Isle of May Bird Observatory Trust, first as Secretary and currently as Chairman. He regularly visits the island and, with Mark Oksien, has been the driving force behind the major improvements which have taken place at the Observatory between 2012 and 2015. His practical skills and experience as a surveyor mean that he is as adept at installing a new water supply as tracking down a Lanceolated Warbler. Importantly, Ian has a strong belief that birdwatching should be fun and that enjoyment is an important part of ornithology.

Niall Campbell

Keith Macgregor

It is with a sense of great loss that we report the death of Keith Macgregor as this issue goes to press. An obituary will appear in the December issue of *Scottish Birds*.

Change of email

Local Recorder for Borders: Ray Murray has changed his email address and can now be contacted at: bordersrecorder@gmail.com. His other contact details remain the same.

Plate 220. Laurie Campbell.

Nature Photography Workshops with Laurie Campbell, Waterston House

We are thrilled to announce a new regular addition to the events programme at Waterston House: one-day nature photography workshops with Laurie Campbell.

Laurie was Scotland's first freelance professional nature photographer and is the winner of many photography awards (including 23 in the *BBC's* Wildlife Photographer of the Year competition), author of several books and has a picture library of more than 160,000 images.

Laurie has had a long association with the Club as a member, winter meetings & conference speaker and has of course exhibited his work numerous times in the Club's art gallery. We are delighted to be working in collaboration to offer these one-day photography workshops, which will allow us to showcase the SOC and our facilities at Waterston House to a new audience.

Workshops will be structured to show participants how to get the most from whatever photographic equipment they happen to own, with emphasis on the basics of exposure and composition. With a maximum of six places available on each course, Laurie will be able to maximise his time with each participant on a one-to-one basis, in order to offer a bespoke experience.

Dates, times and prices are still being finalised but members will benefit from a discount on the workshop fee. If you would like to be notified when details become available, please contact HQ or email jane.cleaver@the-soc.org.uk

For more information or to book a place on any upcoming events at Waterston House, call 01875 871330.

Plate 221. Norway Maple. © *Laurie Campbell*

A roosting male Merlin in Lothian, winter 2014/15

D. ALLAN

Plate 222. The Merlin roost site, with rows of Ash trees down the country road surrounded by winter wheat, Lothian, April 2015. 'Tree 1' is in the foreground. © *Dave Allan*

On 22 January 2015, I was checking out areas for Barn Owl, late evening, and turned down a single track road to an isolated Lothian farm. Half way along the road, I glimpsed a raptor roosting in a moderately sized Ash tree on the road side; my thought was a Kestrel, however the bird seemed too small. The road was a dead end, so on my return I took a close look at the bird and, to my surprise, it was a male Merlin.

I checked the site late the following night, the 23rd, and again on the 24th, and found the bird roosting on the same branch of the same tree. The bark on the branch on which the bird was roosting appeared quite worn giving the impression it had been using the roost for some time.

I only saw the bird move on one occasion, as a result of a Land Rover touching the fence as it pulled over to pass. The bird tried to get back in the tree, almost holding in the wind and looking unsettled before veering off and appearing to go to ground in the darkness a short distance away. I left the area immediately and hoped the bird hadn't been scared from the area; to my relief the bird was back on the same perch on the same tree the following night. I was to monitor this site nightly for the duration of the bird's stay, a total of 72 nights, plus a few more at the end just to make sure the bird had departed.

Plate 223. Male Merlin at roost, Lothian, March 2015. © *Dave Allan*

Of the 72 visits to the area the bird was recorded on 65 of the visits and was recorded roosting in five different Ash trees, as follows: 'tree 1' - 51 times, 'tree 2' - 9 times, 'tree 3' - 2 times, 'tree 4' - 2 times, 'tree 5' - once. On seven visits the bird could not be located, but this doesn't mean it was not present as near the end of the monitoring I discovered the bird roosting in the crook of 'tree 1' where it was extremely difficult to see. It is possible, therefore, that I may have missed it on this roost on previous visits although the bird was usually fairly easy to spot.

Roost site

The roost site was some 120 m (390 feet) above sea level on a gently sloping hill, surrounded by arable land, with hedgerows, rough grassland, scrub, mature woodlands and coniferous shelter belts. The coast was also within potential hunting range for the bird. The road was 420 m long, with young Ash trees around 7–8 m tall on either side some 27.5 m apart. Both sides of the road had winter wheat fields with electricity pylons and telephone poles/wires running through the fields.

Plate 224. Male Merlin at roost, Lothian, April 2015. © *Dave Allan*

Roost position

The bird roosted some 2 m from the edge of the road and between 2 and 3.80 m off the ground, except on one occasion, during thick mist, when it was sitting in the tree used only once and near to the top. The five trees the bird used were all on the east side of the road, and the bird always roosted on the east or south-east side of the tree.

Arrival/departure times

The site was extremely exposed and, not wanting to attract attention to the bird, I only made two visits before sunset. I arrived on both occasions about an hour before sunset. On the first visit the bird came in 30 minutes after sunset in a clear sky. On the second visit, the bird arrived 29 minutes after sunset with light cloud cover.

On one occasion a visit was made 30 minutes before sunrise and the bird was not present.

Weather

The bird was recorded roosting during a wide variety of weather conditions including freezing temperatures, driving snow and rain, extremely strong winds, and heavy rain.

Comments

The roost was a surprise to me - firstly the exposed location and secondly the close proximity to the road made it seem an unlikely place to roost. The bird sat tight during some extremely unpleasant conditions, even when being buffeted by strong winds, despite there being sheltered areas nearby. The bird was also surprisingly approachable and on a couple of occasions I was well within 2 m of it, without it showing any sign of agitation.

The panoramic views afforded to the bird, however, would undoubtedly have been beneficial, looking over an ideal arena for hunting from first light. Potential prey species seen in the immediate vicinity of the roost site included Yellowhammer and Tree Sparrow, and common garden species around the farm.

The last sighting of the bird was on 3 April, when an area of high pressure came in, producing warmer and settled conditions.

There appears to be little published on roosting Merlins. Dickson (1973) describes a situation very different to this one, with a communal roost in waterlogged sallow thickets. Some of his other observations concur with mine, such as the arrival time relative to sunset and the date on which the roost was deserted. Cramp & Simmons (1986) also mention winter roosting on the ground amongst rank vegetation, in young conifer plantations and once in outbuildings of a cottage, but I can find no mention of isolated, exposed trees being used, such as the ones described here. Interestingly, in Canada, Warkentin & James (1990) found that Merlins didn't use buildings to shelter from the wind in urban roost sites (mostly pines trees).

Reference

Cramp, S. & Simmons, K.E.L. 1986. *The Birds of the Western Palearctic*. Volume 2. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Dickson, R.C. 1973. A Merlin roost in Wigtownshire. *Scottish Birds* 7(6): 288–292.

Warkentin, I.G. & James, P.C. 1990. Winter roost-site selection by urban Merlins (*Falco columbarius*). *Journal of Raptor Research* 24(102): 5–11.

Dave Allan, Edinburgh

Satellite tagging Kestrels

G. RIDDLE

Plate 225. Gordon Riddle with 'George', Ayrshire, June 2015. © *Dave Anderson*

In the last week of June 2015, six young Kestrels, two from each of three broods, were satellite tagged in Ayrshire and Dumfries & Galloway in order to study their dispersal, movement and mortality. This project is the latest stage of a long-term study of the Kestrel by Gordon Riddle which has been ongoing since 1973. One of the birds, 'George', was sponsored by the SOC and named after George Waterston. The bird was one of a brood of five from a pair which used one of the many nest boxes in the main study area. Dave Anderson fitted the tags onto the birds, not an easy task because of the feisty nature of these small falcons. George's satellite tag has begun transmitting and his progress, along with the others will be updated on his website www.riddle-kestrel.com. It is very much into the unknown, as this is possibly the first attempt at tagging young Common Kestrels in Europe, although work has been done on the Lesser Kestrel.

Gordon Riddle, Ayrshire.
Email: gordon@riddle-kestrel.com

Plate 226. Colour-ringed adult Shag in Aberdeenshire. © *Nick Picozzi*

Sea storms and skerries: where do Shags go in winter?

H. GRIST, J. REID, F. DAUNT, S. WANLESS

It's a grey February day, and we're sat hunched out of the worst of the harsh weather in Fraserburgh harbour, on the north-east tip of the Aberdeenshire coast. Although we are all losing feeling in our fingers, our attention is completely captured by the huddled black bird on top of the harbour wall, just visible through the telescope. It's difficult to see in the low light conditions, but it is just possible to make out the three letters on the bright red ring on the left leg that marks this bird as one of the over 1,000 Shags that are known to breed on the Isle of May, nearly 200 km further south in the Firth of Forth. This bird has made the journey up the coast to spend the coldest months of the year around Fraserburgh harbour. As the rain finds its way inexorably down the neck of our rain jackets, the obvious question is: why?

It isn't unusual to find birds that change locations between seasons, particularly in temperate regions like the UK. Around half of the bird species found here are thought to be migratory: either summer visitors like Swallows that head south during the winter to find better food resources, or winter visitors such as White-fronted Geese that breed further north, but come to the UK for the milder winter conditions. However, for some species like Shags, the patterns are less clear-cut. Shags can be seen along the rocky coasts of the UK all year round, and don't make spectacular long-distance journeys like many seabirds (Plate 226). However, observations on the Isle of May breeding colony suggest that the number of Shags spotted drops considerably over the winter months. Clearly, some of these birds are going somewhere else during the

winter, but finding out where or why has proved considerably trickier.

We know more than ever about some of the impressive journeys taken by migratory birds thanks to the increasingly small and accurate location tags that can be attached to a variety of species, from Puffins (Harris *et al.* 2010) to Red-necked Phalarope (Smith *et al.* 2014). However, there is a trade-off with using some of this amazing technology: for populations with more diverse patterns of movement, it can be difficult to track enough individuals to fully understand which birds are moving where, and what the consequences are for survival and breeding success. Fortunately, those of us studying Shags have one big advantage: Shags don't have a fully waterproof plumage, so unlike most seabird species they can't spend long periods at sea, and have to return to land at night to dry off. This means that the best way to answer questions about where Shags go in the winter is to return to basics: ring as many as we can, and then try to find them again.

Thanks to a long-term study we have run as the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology on the Isle of May between 1989 and 2014, over 13,000 Shags were ringed with coloured plastic leg rings with a unique three letter code (Plate 227). If the ring is visible (they always seem to stand on the wrong leg!), an individual bird can be identified from a distance of up to 150 m, using binoculars or a telescope. It sounds simple, but in order to record the rings, we first have to find the birds. For the first winter we were all braving the east coast weather along with several dedicated volunteers, but the number of locations was simply too much for a small team. Fortunately, this is what SOC and BTO members do best: over the past six years, ever increasing numbers of volunteers have headed out fearlessly into the winter, and sent in resightings of colour-ringed Shags from over 30 different locations along the east coast. The result has been absolutely phenomenal: in the first three winters alone, the locations of nearly 900 Isle of May breeding Shags were recorded.

Plate 227. Colour-ringed Shags, taken in various locations along the east coast of Scotland. © *Ed Duthie, Mark Newell, Hannah Grist, Roy Slaterus, Raymond Duncan.*

All of this effort has paid off, and some really fascinating patterns have emerged. As we suspected, large numbers of the Shags that breed on the Isle of May don't move at all, and will spend both winter and summer on the island. However, those that do move can end up in a wide variety of places over 600 km of coastline, stretching from Yorkshire to Thurso (Grist *et al.* 2014). Some locations seem to have more individuals than others: for example, around 50 Shags that breed on the Isle of May were resighted in the first winter at Portknockie in Moray, but only 10 around Peterhead in Aberdeenshire, even though Portknockie is over 100 km further from the Isle of May (Figure 1).

The advantage of having resightings from multiple winters is that we can also compare where individuals go from one winter to the next. It turns out that individuals are incredibly site-faithful, returning to exactly the same winter locations year after year. For example, a Shag seen in Fraserburgh in one winter will almost certainly be back there the next winter. Even more impressively, individual Shags manage to head back to the exact same roosting spot on the same rock.

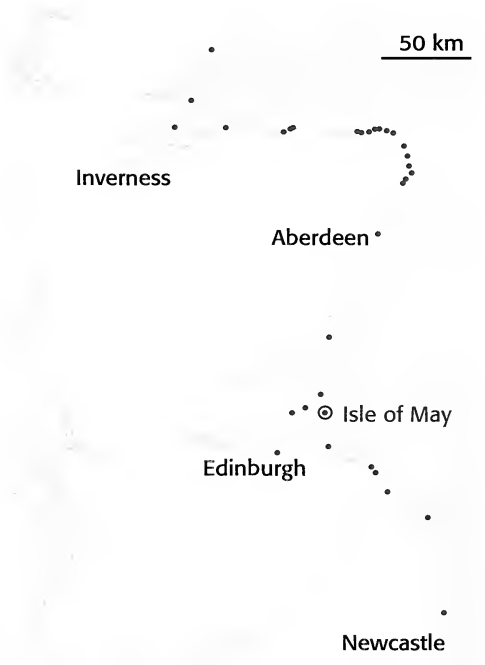


Figure 1. Map showing the key winter resighting locations 2009–2011 of colour-ringed Shags that were known to have bred on the Isle of May.

Overall, some of the Shags that breed on the Isle of May remain there throughout winter, and the rest migrate to other locations. This pattern of mixed migrants and residents within a single population is known as 'partial migration'. As we study bird movement more and more at an individual level, it seems increasingly that a lot of different species may be partial migrants as well, including common British birds such as Blackcaps (Rolshausen *et al.* 2013). That it is so widespread just makes the original question even more intriguing. If some individuals can survive on the breeding colony all year round, why do others migrate? There are no easy answers, but with such a detailed dataset of individual Shags both at the breeding colony and now during the winter, we can get some clues by understanding the consequences of migrating or not.

It may seem counterintuitive to us for Shags to head north during the winter, but there is a lot about the life of seabirds that is unknown: for example, it may be that there simply is more food there. Might Shags that migrate from the Isle of May during the winter simply find more food, and return in better condition the following season? If so, we would expect these individuals to have more chicks than those that are resident all year round at the breeding colony. Yet we find the exact opposite pattern; in fact, residents generally breed a week earlier than migrants, and have almost one chick more on average (Figure 2). That's a huge difference for a species that only raises 1–4 chicks each season.

Perhaps another possibility is that those individuals that migrate may be more likely to survive the long harsh winters, by staying in places that are more protected from the worst of the weather. The partially waterproof plumage is useful for diving deeply, but not for maintaining a high body temperature in freezing conditions, and Shags can be badly affected by long periods of adverse weather. Unfortunately, we just don't have enough information to answer this question yet. During the first few years of the study most of the Isle of May population survived: great news for the Shags, but not very easy for us to tell any differences in survival between migrants and residents. However, the past two winters have been a complete contrast, with reports of large numbers of Shags been washed up onshore due

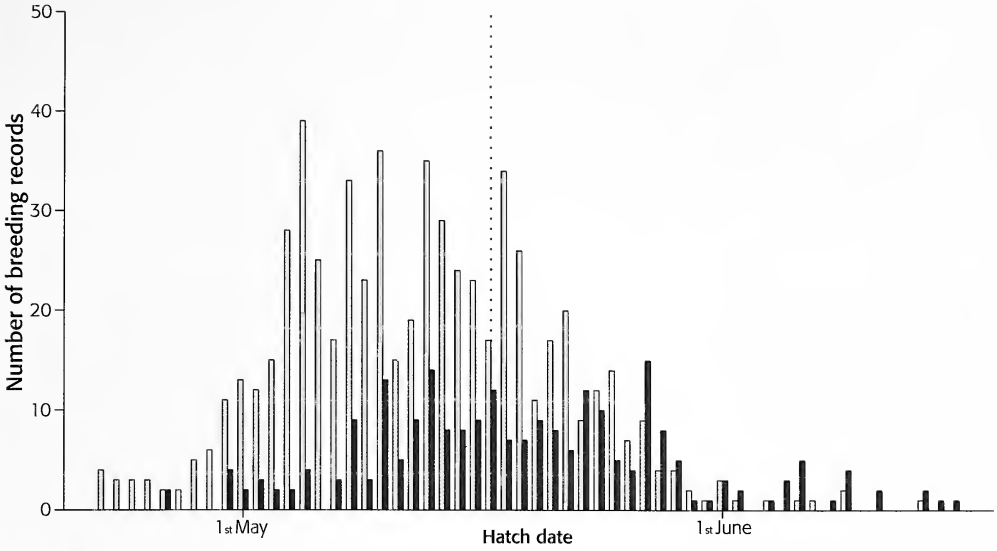


Figure 2. Hatch dates of broods by colour-ringed Shags resighted as residents (light blue) or migrants (dark blue) during one or more winters 2009–2010 and breeding on the Isle of May during summers 2010–2012. Dashed lines indicate median hatch dates of residents (light blue) and migrants (dark blue).

to poor weather conditions. We are starting to look into whether there are differences in the patterns of survival (watch this space), but in order to do that we need to know which birds did survive. That's why, more than ever, we are looking for resightings over the next few winters. The study is growing as more and more people get involved with searching for those elusive colour-rings, and there are so many fascinating questions still to be answered.

We would like to thank all the people that have put such a lot of work into the project, including Mike Harris, Jenny Sturgeon, Mark Newell, Carrie Gunn and Sarah Burthe. In particular, the SOC members that have contributed numerous records to the dataset over the past few years, especially Moray Souter, Raymond Duncan and Bob Swann, as well as SOC Council who have supported the project.

If you are lucky enough to resight a colour-ringed Shag along the east coast, please do get in touch at shags@ceh.ac.uk. Alternatively, if you'd like to help out by doing a survey, we would be very happy to discuss where you might see some Shags near you. We will always be thrilled to hear from you, but be warned: once you've started, it can get addictive!

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Hannah Grist, University of Aberdeen/ Centre for Ecology & Hydrology/Scottish Ornithologists' Club; Jane Reid, University of Aberdeen; Francis Daunt, Centre for Ecology & Hydrology; Sarah Wanless, Centre for Ecology and Hydrology.

Plate 228. The 2015 Scottish Birdfair (hereon referred to as Scotland's Big Nature Festival), Musselburgh, May 2015. © *Majdanik Photography*

With a new name and a fantastic new venue, 'Scotland's Big Nature Festival' 2015 took place over the weekend of 23–24 May at Musselburgh Lagoons, East Lothian.

On the doorstep of our capital city, the site is one of Lothian's premier birding locations and a Mecca for birdwatchers all year-round thanks to the rich diversity of species it supports - a fitting venue for an event showcasing Scotland's wonderful wildlife!

In keeping with the year upon year trend, visitor numbers continued to climb in 2015 with 6,000 people attending the festival over the weekend. Likewise, there were more exhibitor stands to browse, more celebrities to spot and an even busier programme of high-calibre events to pick and choose from.

Now in its fourth year of running, SOC staff and volunteers manning the stand that weekend knew to come armed with gloves, scarves, waterproofs and of course, sunscreen. Well, the weather delivered and festival-goers were treated to glorious sunshine across those few days, a period which is now being labelled 'Summer 2015'.

As in previous years, the Club contributed a busy programme of events to the weekend's activities, taking full advantage of the opportunity to showcase our organisation to a target audience of bird and wildlife enthusiasts.

The SOC was delighted to have John Calladine kick off proceedings with an engaging and informative talk on Whinchats. John drew upon extensive survey data and local study results to provide a summary of the conservation opportunities and dilemmas facing these charismatic birds.

Lothian member Stan da Prato and the Club's own Dave Allan led several *Birdwatching for Beginners* walks over the weekend. Novice

birdwatchers were able to soak up some of Dave and Stan's extensive knowledge of the wide range of the birds present. Although the timing of the event meant that few sea or shore birds were present, the walks concentrated on identifying passerines by their songs.

The Club was fortunate to have Chris Waltho, co-author of the impressive Poyser monograph *The Common Eider,* accompany the team for a book signing on the Saturday.

It was standing room only at Lothian member Martin Scott's excellent and well-prepared Wader ID Workshop, which was peppered with helpful hints and tips to help distinguish species in the field.

By popular demand, SOC Vice President Ian Thomson returned to host another Raptor ID Workshop. Participants benefited from Ian's wealth of knowledge on the subject and should now be well versed in telling their kites from their Kestrels and their Hobbies from their harriers!

Glasgow University PhD student, Iain Malzer closed proceedings for the SOC with a much-enjoyed talk on the importance of reedbed management for Beaded Tits in the Tay Reedbeds. Iain's depth of knowledge on his subject was hugely impressive and has greatly added to the understanding of the species.

Plate 230. Releasing a ringed Chaffinch, Scotland's Big Nature Festival, Musselburgh, May 2015. © *Majdanik Photography*

Back at the SOC stand, staff and volunteers were kept busy with visitors stopping by to find out more about the Club, our branches and what we do. The second-hand book stall caught the eye of many thanks to some excellent donations and recent bequests of books, taking nearly £300 over the weekend. The sales figure was topped up to £500 with purchases on the stand including SOC pin badges and Bottle Top Bird Feeder Kits.

Plate 229. Pond dipping in the East Lothian Council tent, Scotland's Big Nature Festival, Musselburgh, May 2015. © *Majdanik Photography*

Plate 231. Bird ringing demonstration, Scotland's Big Nature Festival, Musselburgh, May 2015. © *Majdanik Photography*

As ever, having the chance to chat to the public and members long-standing and new, was a highlight of our being at the festival. As was the opportunity to share the stage with so many of our partner organisations, brought together by a mutual passion for nature.

We were delighted to make 12 new memberships for the Club across the weekend and thrilled that this included a number of juniors - a warm welcome to you all! Several boxes worth of recent issues of *Scottish Birds* (with attached joining form) were also handed out on the stand, so we hope in time, more forms will be returned to Waterston House.

Plate 232. Bug hunt, Scotland's Big Nature Festival, Musselburgh, May 2015. © *Anna Pugh*

With several years of practice under our belts, our preparation for the festival generally goes to plan - a compliment to the team of staff and volunteers who assist me! There are many tasks to be carried out in preparation for the event, from making up Club information packs and new member welcome packs to coding leaflets, cleaning signage, gathering materials and that's all before we even enter to the showground. Numerous people had a hand in the Club's success here and for your dedication and support, I am most grateful. Special thanks also to those who led an activity on behalf of the SOC at the festival. Having this content in the programme gives us a chance to showcase our organisation and without this we would not gain anywhere near the same level of exposure or recognition.

Finally, a thank you to our members. Your membership support makes it possible for the Club to attend high-profile events such as this one - essential in securing the long term future of the SOC and allowing us to continue our work watching over Scotland's birds.

Look out for details of Scotland's Big Nature Festival 2016 in the next issue!

Jane Cleaver, SOC Development Officer

Bird photography for the aged - a weight off my shoulders

J. MAXWELL

Has there ever been a time when as many people took images of themselves and their surroundings? It seems that nearly everyone now uses either a phone, an iPad or one of the various types of camera to record people, places and probably in the case of many SOC members, wildlife. Speaking personally, I was using Nikon cameras and lenses in that far-off pre-digital age when the great Eric Hosking was the bird photographer idol on everyone's lips. It was a singular, lonely pursuit with many dawn forays and the excitement of positioning the canvas hide in wild surroundings to photograph birds. Great times! The gradual changeover to digital photography was more or less bridged by the growing use of telescopes by birdwatchers and I was one of many who graduated naturally into digiscoping as a way of recording wildlife while still being able to observe it closely. Now in my eightieth year, I'd love to give in to the lure of the SLR and the excellent big lenses, but I simply can't now comfortably support that kind of weight around and even the telescope is being left at home more often because of its carrying problems.

Plate 234. Hooded Crow on Catacol shore, Arran. © *Jimmy Maxwell*

Enter the simple bridge camera! My recent purchase was the Canon SX50 which of course sports a 50x zoom lens, not a new model, but well recommended. I've been satisfied with birds taken at a fair distance, like this Hooded Crow (Plate 234) - not usually a very easy species to capture. I'm also enjoying using it in my quest to photograph all the British dragonflies - carrying it around on rough ground and bogs is no problem (Plate 233).

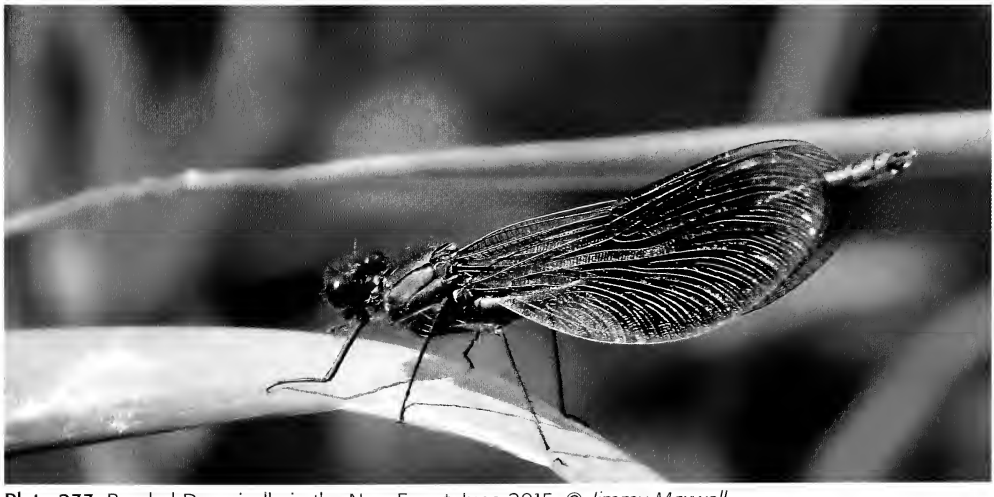


Plate 233. Banded Demoiselle in the New Forest, June 2015. © *Jimmy Maxwell*

Plate 235. View from the ruined village, Portavadie, Argyll, May 2015. © *Jimmy Maxwell*

However, I've found that one of its main uses is to reach wildlife beyond the binocular range, really replacing the telescope for long viewing. A typical occasion was on a visit to an ancient ruined village in the hills near Portavadie, Argyll (Plate 235). While scanning the treetops for raptors with the binoculars, I had spied some kind of movement in the distant bleached pine stumps, up in the top right corner of the picture. The camera's 50x lens covered that distance without any problem to reveal a Roe Deer among the trees (Plate 236). With birds, species recognition and recording at a distance are made so much easier.

Apart from the great pleasure in using this wee camera, other benefits are the ease of packing when going abroad and also the lack of spatial complications when photographing from crowded public hides. I do however feel rather insignificant when my camera's puny little "click" is drowned by a fusillade of SLR shutter zapping when something exciting appears outside!

Jimmy Maxwell

Plate 236. Roe Deer in cover, Portavadie, Argyll, May 2015. © *Jimmy Maxwell*

FIELD NOTE

Kingfishers associating with Otters

Ian Fulton commented that the birds in Plate 237 were following two Otters in the manner described by Chris McInerny in the last issue of *Scottish Birds* (35(2): 130–131), apparently to increase their chances of catching aquatic food items. Other observers have witnessed this behaviour elsewhere in the Clyde area, and also noticed Kingfishers associating with Goosanders to aid catching prey: Alexander Nicol saw on Loch Lomond a Kingfisher following an Otter at the Endrick Mouth and, on another occasion, a Kingfisher with a feeding Goosander at Balmaha Bay; and Chris Everett observed a Kingfisher with a Goosander on the White Cart Water. Given that this Kingfisher behaviour had not been documented before, it is significant that it has been recorded (and even photographed) in other places, and potentially with another bird species. It will be interesting to see if it is observed elsewhere in Scotland.

Plate 237. Kingfishers with Otter, River Clyde, Baron's Haugh, Clyde, July 2014. © *Ian Fulton*.

Plate 238. Female Black-throated Diver, Speyside, 20 July 2015. © *Michael Crutch*

Black-throated Diver killing Mallard chicks

On 20 July 2015, I watched a female Black-throated Diver tending a single chick on a Speyside loch. A female Mallard plus three ducklings were minding their own business some 20 m away. The female Black-throated Diver dived, and remained under the surface until suddenly appearing amidst the Mallard family having grabbed one of the ducklings as it emerged from the water. The duckling was held under the water, and eventually the diver submerged only to soon re-appear on another duckling - this time it let go of it after a mauling with its bill, the duckling being left maimed and upside-down on the loch surface. The third duckling was similarly attacked and drowned. The female Mallard remained vocal throughout, but only after the attacks did she fly from the loch side around the Black-throated Diver and continued to do so for some time.

I have never seen this behaviour before, and although most probably territorial in origin, the fact it was only directed at the ducklings and not the adult Mallard was noteworthy.

Plate 239. Female and juvenile Black-throated Divers, Speyside, 20 July 2015. © *Michael Crutch*

Plate 240. Female Black-throated Diver attacking Mallard duckling, Speyside, 20 July 2015. © *Michael Crutch*

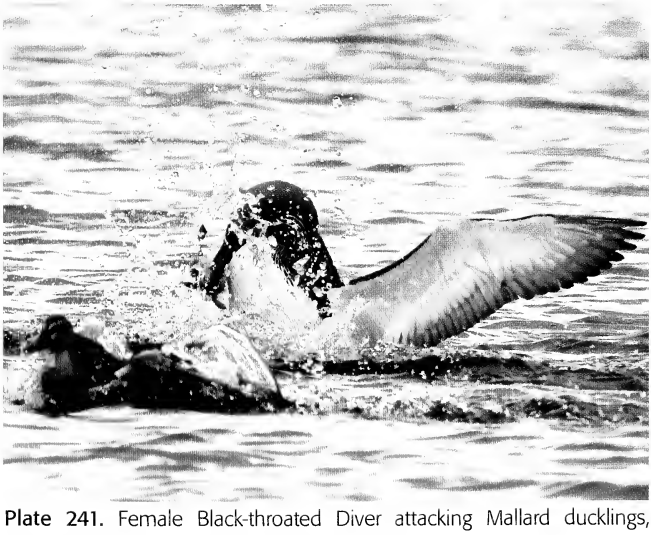


Plate 241. Female Black-throated Diver attacking Mallard ducklings, Speyside, 20 July 2015. © *Michael Crutch*

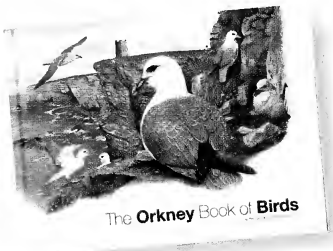
Michael Crutch,
Easter Greens, Dunphail,
Moray IV36 2QR.
Email: a9birding@gmail.com

It should be stated that Black-throated Diver is a Schedule 1 species (and therefore breeding birds are protected at or near the nest) and that normally a licence is required for such photography. In this instance, it has been confirmed that the photographer was inside a vehicle on a public road and caused no disturbance to the birds. ***Eds***

BOOK REVIEWS

The book reviews published in Scottish Birds *reflect the views of the named reviewers and not those of the SOC.*

The Orkney Book of Birds. Tim Dean, illustrated by Tracy Hall, 2nd edition, 2014. The Orcadian Ltd (Kirkwall Press), Kirkwall, Orkney, ISBN 978-1-902957-68-5, £25.00.



The first edition of this lovely landscape-format book was published in 2008. It has since spawned 'The Orkney Pocket Book of Birds' and now this second edition of the larger format work.

This is not a county avifauna, rather it has accounts of the 187 species that one is most likely to encounter in Orkney. In fact, as the book tells us in a useful 10-page appendix, 405 species have been recorded in the Orkney Islands up to the end of August 2014, but, Orkney being positioned where it is, many of these have occurred only as rare migrants or lost vagrants and these are not covered.

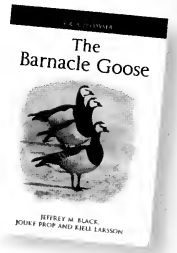
The species accounts are arranged more or less in systematic order, usually four per page with a page of text opposite a page of illustrations. The text does not deal with identification but gives the status and history of each species and is full of useful and interesting detail.

The illustrations are, in the main, beautifully done and, uniquely, set each species in a recognisable Orkney context. For example, the Corncrake is shown at Nouster on Papa Westray, an island that for years was the species' stronghold in the islands; the Iceland Gull is in Stromness Harbour where each year one or more birds always appear between Xmas and New Year; and, delightfully, the Water Rail is shown in the pool outside the Orkney Brewery! The illustrations are so good that it has already become an Orkney parlour game to identify the locations without reference to the captions.

A preface to this second edition gives an account of some of the ongoing changes in the status of some Orkney birds. Although 2014 itself was an exception, seabirds continue to have very poor productivity and numbers have tumbled. Greylag Geese, however, are still proliferating and there are concerns that their numbers may be beginning to have a deleterious effect on breeding Red-throated Divers on some of the moorland lochans. Hen Harriers, which went through a bad period during the 1990s, have recovered and in recent years there have been as many as 100 breeding females. The preface puts this down to provision of good hunting habitat through various agri-environment schemes although it has been shown that declining sheep numbers resulting from changes to the Common Agricultural Policy were the main driver. There have been some interesting additions to the list of breeding passerines in the islands; Goldfinch and Coal Tit, both decidedly scarce visitors 20 years ago, are both now breeding and hirundines, especially Swallows, have increased greatly. However, perhaps the greatest change to the island's bird populations could come through the recent introduction of Stoats into the Mainland and linked South Isles. Just what their effects on Orkney's ground-nesting birds, especially waders and wildfowl and on the Orkney Vole, a staple part of the diet of Hen Harriers, Kestrels and Short-eared Owls will be, remains to be seen.

Eric Meek

The Barnacle Goose. Jeffrey M. Black, Jouke Pro & Kjell Larsson, 2014. T & A D Poyser, London, ISBN 978-1-4729-1157-5, hardback, 288 pages, £50.00.



This book describes the findings of detailed studies of two populations of the Barnacle Goose, one which breeds in Svalbard and winters on the Solway Firth, including at Caerlaverock, and the other which breeds in the Baltic Sea region and winters on the North Sea coasts of Germany and the Netherlands. It presents the results of work which commenced in the 1970s on the Svalbard-Solway population and on the establishment of the Baltic population in 1971.

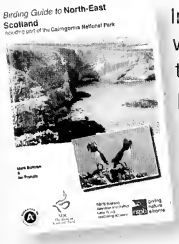
The authors aim to address two key questions: "what makes a successful goose and which individual characteristics drive population expansion?" To achieve this, the book has chapters which include research methods, finding mates, long-term partnerships, family life, food and feeding and population dynamics. The effort involved in gathering this information cannot be underestimated, as the chapter on research methods and the many references testify. The findings presented highlight the value of such long-term studies and each

chapter provides an excellent and very readable summation of the huge amount of data gathered and the work undertaken in analysing each aspect of the two populations in terms of behavioural and population ecology. Differences between the two populations are also presented including the impact of different migratory strategies. Anything the reader wants to know about the Barnacle Geese wintering on the Solway Firth should be found in this book.

From a Scottish perspective the only disappointment is that hardly any mention is made of the population which winters on Islay but it would be churlish to call this omission a criticism. The level of commitment to a single-species study as exemplified by the findings in this book and the excellent way the data are presented make it a fitting addition to the Poyser family of books and it is thoroughly recommended.

Allan W Brown

Birding Guide to North-East Scotland. Mark Sullivan & Ian Francis, 2015. Pica Design, Aboyne, ISBN 978-0-9561126-7-5, paperback, 130 pages, £7.50.



Inexpensive and well-produced, this guide provides detailed location, access and birding information to most of the main sites in Aberdeen City and Shire, from St Cyrus to Cullen and from the city to the tops of the Cairngorms. The biggest void in coverage lies in the inland parts of the north of the county: the upper sections of the Ythan and the lower Deveron drainage areas, where great birding can be found, but few birders explore. The book includes a local checklist.

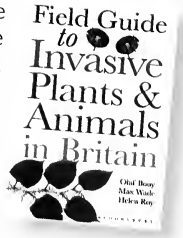
North-east Scotland is not usually included in tours of the country by visiting birders who more frequently head to Strathspey and the Northern and Western Isles. This comprehensive book shows what a mistake that can be. The absence of Crested Tits and breeding skuas is more than countered by vast, accessible seabird colonies, including a dramatic mainland gannetry, upland and forest wildernesses, spectacular assemblages of summer and winter wildfowl, and one of the best mainland coastlines for rare migrants in spring and autumn. Add Corn Buntings, winter gulls, King Eider, Surf Scoter and White-billed Divers and what more could you want?

Alan Knox

Field Guide to Invasive Plants & Animals in Britain. Olaf Booy, Max Wade & Helen Roy, 2015. Bloomsbury, London, ISBN 978-1-4081-2318-8, paperback, 304 pages, £24.99.

This very comprehensive guide is wide-ranging - it covers invasive non-native species, mainly plants, which take up half the book, but also mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles, fish, and invertebrates (both freshwater and terrestrial). Altogether over 180 species are covered.

Each species is pictured and described, with maps showing distribution and an indication of how the species is spread by humans, an indicator of population increases or decreases, and also a comment on ease of identification. Where appropriate there is a clear indicator of those species which should be reported to the appropriate authorities. Some species are included as potential threats even though they are not yet established in Britain - an example is the Indian House Crow, now resident in the Netherlands and a possible future stowaway on ships.



Much will of course depend on the individual reader's specific interests, but most general naturalists will have an interest in trying to protect our natural environment from invasive species - we have all seen examples of how rapidly Japanese Knotweed or Himalayan Balsam can take over waste ground or waterways. I was slightly surprised to find that the map (page 72) does not show any of the Garlics in Scotland, though my CBC wood at Roslin Glen, Lothian, is increasingly covered in Few-flowered or Three-cornered Garlics, and a recent visit to Paxton House, Borders, had masses of the latter growing close to the Tweed - OK, only just in Scotland!

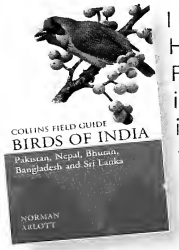
All in all, this is a very wide-ranging and useful field guide which is likely to find a place in many of our rucksacks.

Mike Betts

Birds of India: Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Norman Arlott, 2015. William Collins, London, ISBN 978-0-00-742955-4, hardback, 400 pages, £29.99.

Birders already have a choice of field guides to this bird rich region. So how does this new offering from Collins compare with the Helm guide by Grimmett *et al.*, perhaps the most popular of the alternatives? Good illustrations are essential for a quality field guide.

To my eyes many illustrations on the 165 plates, of adults only and few birds in flight, are too dark and/or too saturated. Overall, I prefer the 226 plates in the Helm guide which show more ages and plumages and more in flight. Unlike the Helm guide, the very brief texts contain little helpful information on identification when comparing very similar species. Distribution maps opposite the plates are best for checking quickly a possible identification against likely occurrence. In the Collins guide they are all grouped at the back of the book and show resident, summer and winter ranges. The Helm maps are placed opposite the relevant plates and show more information such as migration routes.



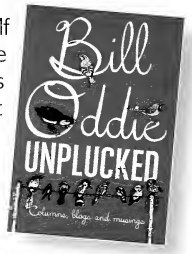
I would choose the Helm field guide. For more detailed information on identification, taxonomy, status, etc., check out the two-volume Ripley guide by Rasmussen and Anderton. If you can afford it, get both.

Alan Brown

Bill Oddie Unplucked. Bill Oddie, 2015. Bloomsbury, London, ISBN 978-1-4729-1531-3, hardback, 224 pages, £14.99.

Bill Oddie has been one of UK's top birders and funniest men. He identified Britain's first Pallas's Reed Bunting (whatever happened to them?) and helped us identify Spotted Sandpipers while being the funniest of the Goodies on the BBC.

This is a compilation of his recent columns, blogs and musings - and it is pretty good, with lots of interesting observations, amusing adventures and important points surrounding nature conservation and species matters.



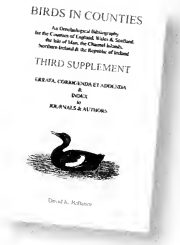
I found myself skimming some chapters of his latest but others I really enjoyed. I wish I had written Chapter Four: New Fangled Birding, I have certainly thought it far too many times! On the other hand, I am very pleased he wrote Chapter 38: Crimes Against Nature; it is good to hear a new passionate voice on this scandalous subject.

WEO (as we bird spotters prefer to call him) has been through a lot and achieved a lot. This book never quite reaches the heady heights of the *Little Black Bird Book* (1980) and it is different anyway - lots of amusing bits but more serious, reflective, important stuff.

Ken Shaw

Birds in Counties: Third Supplement. David K. Ballance, 2015. Published by the author, Minehead, ISBN 978-0-9552787-8-5, paperback, 148 pages, £20 including p&p.

The third and final supplement to a work first published in 2000 makes further additions and provides a full index to authors and local journals for the entire work.



This ornithological bibliography, with its supplements, is an essential reference work for anyone interested in British local ornithology. It has been a real labour of love and the author should be congratulated on finishing this project. No work of this nature can be described as complete and the author would still like to hear of any omissions or errors.

Available direct from the author in Minehead, Somerset. Telephone 01643 706820 (preferably in the evening).

David Clugston

RINGERS' ROUNDUP

If you have any interesting ringing recoveries, articles, project updates or requests for information which you would like to be included in the next issue, please email to Raymond Duncan at ***Raymond@waxwing.fsnet.co.uk****. Thank you very much to the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and the many ringers, ringing groups and birders who provided the information for this latest round up. Thanks also to the many bird watchers who take the time and trouble to read rings in the field or find dead ringed birds and report them.*

For lots more exciting facts, figures, numbers and movements log on to ***http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/ringing/publications/online-ringing-reports***

Icelandic Whimbrel

Hugh Insley, Al McNee, Peter Stronach and Peter Bennett managed the usual haul of colour ring sightings during their annual May wader ringing trip on the Uists, but star of the bunch was a Whimbrel. "Amazingly the eagle-eyed Peter Stronach spotted that the bird was wearing colour rings above its knees from the passenger seat of the car as we returned from Balivanich, during what passes for the rush hour on the single track road at Nunton. Some quick juggling with the oncoming traffic and we soon had a photograph of the bird, which was out in the centre of a freshly sown field. We have learnt that photos of colour rings on waders are the most efficient and only sure way of recording the combinations. A quick look on the internet and we realised that this was one of Tómas Grétar Gunnarsson's birds from Iceland. Having seen and photographed the bird at 08:00 hrs an email to Tómas at 10:00 hrs produced an excited reply within the hour giving us all the ringing details. The bird had been ringed on 2 July 2009 in southern Iceland by Borgný Katrínardóttir at Hof farm in Rangarvallasysla county at 63.80° N 20.16° W. Tómas was really pleased because they get so few sightings reported during migration, and this one opened up the possibility of timing its journey from Uist back up to Iceland. However, like elsewhere in Scotland the weather in the Western Isles was dire during May and we had to tell him that it was unlikely to be going anywhere for a few days until the latest weather front had passed through. Even then the bird confounded us all because for the first time in Tómas's study it changed its breeding area and wasn't found until 8 June some 6 km away from its original nesting site, which are usually only some tens of hectares. There is a fascinating similarity between the habitat in the photograph taken by Peter at Nunton and that surrounding the bird on its breeding grounds back in Iceland."

Plate 242. Colour-ringed Whimbrel, Nunton, South Uist, Outer Hebrides, May 2015 © *Peter Stronach*

Namibian Sanderling

NS99917 Ringed: 19/05/12, Sanday, Orkney.
Resighted: 24/07/13, Baie de Somme, Picardie, France 1042kmS
Resighted: 30/03/14, Walvis Bay Lagoon, Namibia 9275kmS
Resighted: 20/11/14, Walvis Bay Lagoon, Namibia 9275kmS

Immigrants from Calais arrive in Scotland!

Snow Bunting: Two birds ringed on the same day in Calais were resighted on Scottish beaches on their way north this spring.

SY54730 Ringed: 02/02/15, Plage de l'hoverport, Calais, France
(white 31) Resighted: 28/03/15 Lossie Estuary, Moray

SY54744 Ringed: 02/02/15, Plage de l'hoverport, Calais, France
(white 45) Resighted: 26/03/15, West Sands, St. Andrews, Fife

It may seem surprising to find Snow Buntings so far south, but the BTO Online Ringing Reports show there have been nine previous exchanges of ringed birds between the UK and France, 19 involving the UK and Netherlands and 12 involving the UK and Belgium.

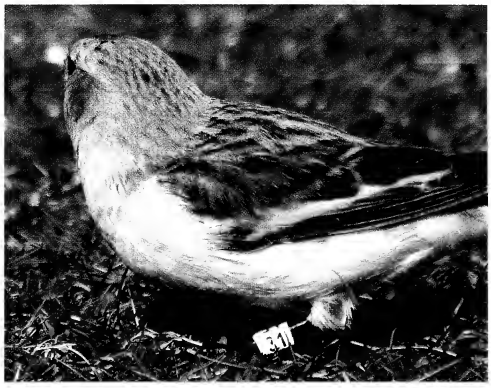


Plate 244. Darviced Snow Bunting white 31, Lossie Estuary, Moray & Nairn, March 2015 © *David Main*

Plate 243. Darviced Snow Bunting white 45, West Sands, St. Andrews, Fife, March 2015 © *James Hutchison*

Plate 245. Goldfinch after being ringed, Aboyne, North-east Scotland, March 2007 © *Harry Scott*

Goldfinch: Continuing the French theme, Ian Livingstone and Strathclyde Ringing Group reported their first ever ringed Goldfinch to be found in France whilst also in the past three years three ringed birds from France have been reported in Strathclyde. Interestingly, the Grampian Ringing Group received their first ever foreign Goldfinch this spring, in Belgium.

L976223 Ringed: 04/08/12, Strathclyde CP, North Lanarkshire
Retrapped: 04/02/13, Oissel, Seine-Maritime, France 796kmSSE

D081768 Ringed: 20/01/13, Whitecairns, nr Aberdeen
Dead: 04/05/15, Genk, Limburg, Belgium 858kmSE

Ian Newton's old classic book *Finches* and the more modern *BTO Migration Atlas* show many UK-ringed Goldfinches have been found on the continent, but these have been mostly from English-ringed birds. Perhaps the species is becoming so successful that numbers are out-stripping the available winter food sources (e.g. nijer feeders in gardens) and more are having to migrate? It is certainly worth continuing the ringing and monitoring in view of such potential changes.

Blackcap: Bob Swan and Highland Ringing Group received details about two very interesting foreign-ringed Blackcaps retrapped mid-winter at Nigg Ferry in the Cromarty Firth, highlighting the rather bizarre inverted migration peculiar to Blackcaps in which some continental birds move across here to over-winter!

AX63096 Ringed: 28/10/14, St Maarten, Schagen, Noord-Holland, Netherlands
Retrapped: 29/12/14, Nigg Ferry, Cromarty Firth, Highland 780kmNW

5611801 Ringed: 08/10/07, Dune Marchand, Zuydcoote, Nord, France
Retrapped: 02/02/08, Nigg Ferry, Cromarty Firth, Highland 851kmNNW

Do Scottish Swallows migrate in clans?
Heading further south into Spain now to digress slightly from our usual variety of fascinating scientific facts and figures to report on a romantic wee Spanish story which raises speculation about the possibility of Scottish Swallows migrating together.

Z129739 Ringed: 10/09/14, Logie Buchan, River Ythan, Grampian
Retrapped: 16/05/15, Gautegiz, Arteaga, Vizcaya, Spain 1557kmS

Z119823 Ringed: 27/08/14, Castle Stuart, nr Balloch, Highland
Retrapped: 16/05/15, Gautegiz, Arteaga, Vizcaya, Spain 1578kmS

Euan Ferguson from Grampian Ringing Group had a great time this spring at Eilat in Israel, ringing all sorts of amazing numbers and species of birds. Not only that, but he even had time to find himself a lovely Spanish señorita called Carmen.

Well what do you know, when he received a recent batch of recoveries containing the above Swallow Z129739, caught in Spain, he realised immediately that Carmen had personally caught this bird herself back home a few weeks after returning from Israel! "It was her best ever night ringing Swallows; she caught 420 and was up all night ringing them herself!"

To complete this coincidence, Hugh Insley from Highland sent through a copy of a Swallow he'd ringed in the Highlands which had also been controlled in Spain … at the same place … on the same night! Turns out Carmen caught two BTO-ringed Swallows that night, both ringed in Scotland the previous autumn.

So a nice wee Spanish romance there, but am I being over-romantic to suppose that some of oor Swallas micht jist come a the y back fae Spain the gither and head awa back into the Heeland Glens to breed?

And back home to some of our local birds making some unexpected movements

Coal Tit

Y597446 Ringed: 18/02/12, Cairnfield, by Buckie, Moray
Retrapped: 24/11/13, Breakachy, Highland 97kmWSW
Retrapped: 21/09/14, Breakachy, Highland 97kmWSW

House Sparrow

TX85625 Ringed: 22/06/14, Clochan, Buckie, Moray
Retrapped: 07/04/15 Meiklemoss, nr Collieston, Grampian 89kmSE

Plate 246. A selfie Scottish-ringed Swallow Z129739, Gautegiz Arteaga, Spain, May 2015. © *Carmen Azahara*

Plate 247. Ring-billed Gull, Townhill Loch, Dunfermline, Fife, February 2015. © *Willie McBay*

Ring-billed Gull, Dunfermline, February–March 2015 - Fife's second adult

J.S. NADIN

Fife's first adult Ring-billed Gull was found at Newburgh by Tommy Ross on 28 February 2014. It was often to be seen sitting on a green marker buoy anchored in the middle of River Tay, but regularly visited the adjacent shoreline in the town, and was present until 23 March - a total stay of 24 days.

On 8 February 2015 I had headed out for a family walk to Townhill Loch, part of the Country Park on the north side of Dunfermline. No binoculars were allowed - after all this was not a birding trip, but importantly I had taken my camera. The loch was completely frozen, and I photographed a showy adult Common Gull at the west end of

Plate 248. Ring-billed Gull, Townhill Loch, Dunfermline, Fife, February 2015. © *John Nadin*

the loch. After some very good coffee and cake in the Lochside Café, we continued our walk. While heading east along the south shore I noticed several gulls sitting on the ice with some very close to the shoreline. Most were Black-headed Gulls, but one bird caught my eye and I took a few images. When I checked them on the camera, and 'zoomed-in' to the head I saw the 'ringed' bill & pale eyes and immediately realised I had found Fife's second ever adult Ring-billed Gull.

The bird was present the next day, and showed very well to the people who came out to see & photograph it. It was almost always in the area just the east of the Scottish Water Ski centre, and it appeared quite tame at times, being particularly partial to bread, which is fed daily to the Mute Swans and Mallards that are always present.

The bird was seen by many during its 39-day stay, with many birders dropping in on their way back after visiting the Harlequin Duck in Aberdeen, and I met several birders from the English Midlands and even some from as far south as London. It was last seen on 18 March, by which time it was moulting into full breeding plumage, and making it Fife's longest staying Ring-billed Gull to date.

John S. Nadin
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Plate 249 (left). Ring-billed Gull, Townhill Loch, Dunfermline, Fife, February 2015. © *John Nadin*
Plate 250 (below). Ring-billed Gull, Townhill Loch, Dunfermline, Fife, February 2015. © *Stuart Rivers*

Plate 251. Ring-billed Gull, Dingwall, Highland, March 2013. © *Harry Scott*

Ring-billed Gulls in Scotland 2005–14

S.L. RIVERS

The first British record of Ring-billed Gull was of an adult at Blackpill, Glamorgan in March 1973. The first Scottish record (7th British) was of a second-winter plumaged bird at the Ythan Estuary, North-east Scotland on 14 February 1976. The subsequent rapid increase in records in Britain resulted in it being taken off the British Birds Records Committee description species list at the end of 1987 - just 15 years after the first record. A continued rise in Scottish records from 1988 saw its removal from the Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC) list at the end of 2009.

The change of status in Britain & Ireland reflected dramatic increases in breeding populations in North America, particularly around the Great Lakes in Ontario and Michigan, where numbers had risen four- to five-fold since the 1960s, and to a lesser extent in New England (Olsen & Larsson 2003).

There were 128 records of 132 individuals in Scotland by the end of 2004 (Forrester *et al.* 2007, ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2010). The pattern of occurrence indicated a strong geographical bias (c.75%) to the west and the Northern Isles, as would be expected of a Nearctic vagrant, with most records from the Outer Hebrides (32), Argyll (24), Shetland (13), Orkney and Ayrshire (10 each). There were also 10 records from Lothian - almost certainly a reflection of high observer coverage and awareness, yet none had been found in the adjacent recording areas of Fife or Borders, nor on the Isle of May, in Upper Forth, Perth and Kinross, Clyde Islands, Caithness or the Skye & Lochalsh region of the Highland recording area. Elsewhere in Britain there is a strong geographical bias in records towards south-west England and southern Wales.

In Scotland there were decade averages of 3.6 birds/year for 1981–90, 5.4 birds/year in 1991–

2000, and an average of 9.75 for 2001–04 - largely due to an unprecedented passage of up to 21 birds in spring 2004 and an annual total of 32 birds that year. The majority of Scottish records (75%) came from the first half of the year, with find dates of 11 in January, 25 in February, 22 in March, 25 in April, nine in May, seven in June, three in July, five in August, four in September, eight in October, five in November and eight in December. This was very similar to the pattern observed in Britain overall. The pulse of 'spring' records (late January–end April) seemed to be tied in with the northward movement of gulls, especially on the west side of Scotland, heading to their breeding areas. Typically, the Ring-billed Gulls associated with Common Gulls rather than Herring Gulls or Black-headed Gulls.

All accepted Ring-billed Gull records in Scotland from 2005 to 2009 were published by SBRC (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2010, 2011, McGowan *et al.* 2013) and by 31 December 2009 a total of 163 birds had been officially recorded in Scotland.

Numbers of Ring-billed Gulls recorded annually in Britain peaked at 108 birds in 1992, but have decreased in recent years with totals of 88 in 2004, 45 in 2005, 43 in 2006, 37 in 2007, 43 in 2008, 20 in 2009, 16 in 2010, 24 in 2011 and 15 in 2012 (Fraser & Rogers 2005 & 2006, White & Kehoe 2014 & 2015). A similar decline in records was seen in Scotland up to 2009. Annual totals of new and returning birds in Scotland were 16 [13 and 3] in 2005, 13 [9/4] in 2006, seven [3/4] in 2007, eight [5/3] in 2008 and five [1/4] in 2009.

The 31 birds in Scotland judged to be new arrivals were one on Orkney, 15 on the Outer Hebrides, six in Argyll, two in Angus & Dundee and singles in Highland (Ross & Cromarty), Moray & Nairn, North-east Scotland, Perth & Kinross, Fife, Upper Forth and Clyde with the birds in Perth & Kinross, Fife and Upper Forth all first records for the respective recording areas. The find dates for the new arrivals gave three in January, six in both February and March, eight in April, three in June, one in September, three in November and one in December. Up to 18 returning birds were also noted in the period.

The geographic distribution of these records shows even more of a bias to the west side of Scotland than those up to the end of 2004, particularly for the Outer Hebrides (48.4% cf 24.2%), while the lack of any records from the Northern Isles is also notable. Greater observer coverage arising from more resident/visiting birders on the Outer Hebrides, and the Uists in particular, may well explain the increase there, but the opposite is not true for the Northern Isles, where observer coverage has not decreased at all. It seems likely that weather events and/or slight changes in flyway routes may have played a part in the drop of records from the latter region during the five-year time period. The monthly pattern of new bird arrivals is very similar to that observed to the end of 2004, with the proportion and duration of the notable 'spring' peak from late January to April replicated almost exactly.

Fraser & Rogers (2006) suggested that the concentration of birds judged to be new arrivals, (rather than returnees), seen in the first half of the year, were mainly individuals which probably crossed the Atlantic during the previous autumn and wintered elsewhere in south-west Europe and then moved north with the early passage of gulls from more southerly latitudes, heading for breeding sites. This would certainly explain the strong bias of records to south-west England and south Wales (Fraser & Rogers 2006). The same authors (Fraser & Rogers 2005) also noted that in 2002 only 14 of c.70 Ring-billed Gulls recorded in Britain that year were first-winters (20%) and suggested the rest were likely to include a high proportion of returning birds. A similar analysis by Fraser (2013) indicated 30 new first-winters among 213 birds recorded between 2004 and 2007 (14%), though the total seems to have omitted a number of first-year records from the Outer Hebrides.

Though the observation that 'spring' new arrivals are a consequence of birds drawn north from areas further south, possibly from south-western Europe, would explain the passage of birds seen on the west side of Scotland there are differences in the relative proportion of new arrivals and returning birds seen annually in Scotland compared to the overall pattern

observed in Britain. It seems that one or more other factors may be involved - perhaps including a movement of birds from Ireland into west Scotland to supplement those from more southerly latitudes and a relative lack of birds in central and eastern Scotland compared to the widespread distribution of records in (southern) England and Wales.

Scottish records since 1 January 2010 have been dealt with by local records committees. One consequence of this is that accepted records are no longer published in a single location, making it is even more of a headache to try to determine annual totals and to discriminate between new arrivals and returning birds (overall nationally). It may also be that there is now a reduction in 'proper reporting' of birds now that they have lost their status as a full 'SBRC description species'. At least four birds publicised on 'bird information' websites and/or text-message services since 2010 were not submitted to local recorders for assessment.

These caveats apart, there were reports of seven different birds in 2010, 13 in 2011, 11 in 2012, 13 in 2013 and about 12 in 2014. The distribution of the find dates in this five year period is similar to the previously established pattern of a broad 'spring' peak containing the bulk of sightings and a spread of records from August to December with small peaks in October and December. In 2010, most reports (5 of 7) were of adult birds, whereas in 2011 this dropped to just under half (6 of 13), and from 2012 immature birds predominated (2012 - four adults, 2013 - six adults and 2014 - four adults). The majority of immature birds (first-winter to second-summer) were seen in the first half of the year.

The geographic spread of records again heavily favoured the Outer Hebrides (13) and Argyll (12 possibly including returning birds), with other west-side birds involving three in Clyde, up to five in Ayrshire and two in Dumfries & Galloway. Highland had records from Achmelvich/Clachtoll, Fort William and Mallaig (all westerly locations) in additions to the regular Dornoch bird, while the Northern Isles returned to form with up to five on Shetland, two on Fair Isle and one on Orkney. Elsewhere there were singles in North-east Scotland and Fife and two in Upper Forth - a first-winter and the returning adult first seen in 2005. Again there were none in Lothian, and there were no additions to the recording areas in which the species has been noted, though both Fife and Upper Forth got their second individuals.

The annual pattern of records in Scotland would appear to be firmly established as a northward passage in the first half of the year, mostly along the west coast and through the Northern Isles but with birds occasionally turning up in the east, followed by birds arriving in autumn and early winter in the north and west which then either continue to move generally south or which linger among winter gull concentrations in Scotland. The geographical location of records on the east side of the country are somewhat more random and seem to involve a higher proportion of returning birds which may move between sites over the duration of each stay.

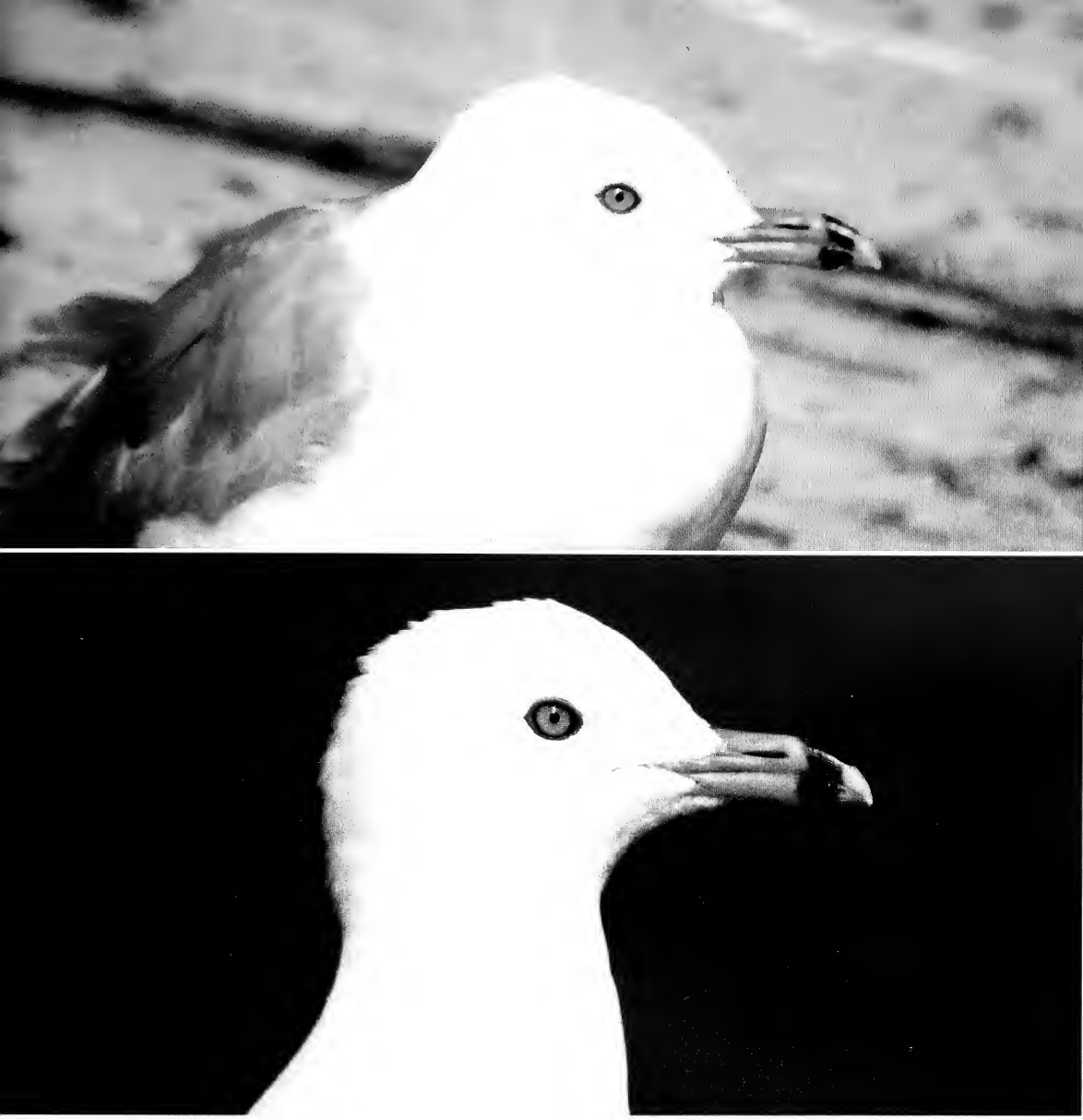
Returning birds appear to form the bulk of Ring-billed Gull records in Britain, and though this indicates individuals are now living entirely in Europe/North-west Africa, rather than North America, there is a distinct possibility that some (many?) birds may actually be commuting across the Atlantic (vagrant birds ringed in Norway have been found back on North American breeding areas, see cyberbirding.uib.no/gull/rbg/ad_04.php).

The phenomenon of returning birds in Scotland is perhaps best illustrated by the individual which favoured the Stromness area of Mainland Orkney. First found as a first-winter bird in 1987, it was last reported on 30 December 2007 - a remarkable 21 year period. Another long-established returnee is still being seen at Dornoch, Highland (2015 was its 12th year), but the bird which frequented the Oban/Dunstaffnage area of Argyll from April 2005 appears to have last been seen on 14 February 2013.

While returning birds are an interesting phenomenon in themselves, they are relatively easy to account for when trying to establish the totals of birds being recorded each year. A far more difficult task is to try to work out if certain

individuals may have been noted from more than one site each year or if they have changed the location they generally frequent over a longer time period. With regard to the Townhill Loch bird in Fife in 2015, it was also noted on several occasions on the nearby coast at Dalgety Bay towards the end of its stay, when plumage features (particularly a twisted outer primary) and times of presence/absence were instrumental in confirming that the same bird was involved. Opinion also suggests that the Townhill bird was not the same as the adult which had been seen regularly at Kinneil, Upper Forth, in recent years, nor the most recent adult seen at Strathclyde Park, Clyde, in 2014 (John Nadin pers. comm., Blasco 2015). This is based on bill pattern and wing-tip pattern differences.

Plates 252–254. Ring-billed Gull, Dingwall, Highland. Primary feather pattern comparison six and a half years apart. **(Top):** October 2006 © *Dave Pullan*. **(Bottom left & right):** March 2013 © *Harry Scott*



Plates 255–256. Ring-billed Gull, Dingwall, Highland. Bill pattern comparison six and a half years apart. **(Top):** October 2006 © *John Nadin*. **(Bottom):** March 2013 © *Harry Scott*

A trickier comparison was to try to answer the question of whether the Townhill bird could be the same adult as seen at Newburgh in north Fife in 2014. While the bill pattern looked similar there seemed to be obvious differences in the wing-tip pattern. As the discussion highlighted, there is insufficient published information to indicate if bill and wing patterns remain consistent throughout adult life or whether these can change - particularly wing-tip patterns exhibited following each successive moult (Blasco 2015). Not an easy subject to research on breeding grounds, but perhaps good quality images of the long-staying individuals which have occurred in Scotland/Britain/elsewhere in Europe, taken in different years of their occurrence, might be a fruitful avenue to explore to see if this can shed any light on this question.

Probably the most remarkable record in the period 2005–14 is of the adult Ring-billed Gull found in a mixed pairing with a Common Gull at an inland breeding colony in June 2009. Though

Plate 257. Ring-billed Gull at inland Common Gull breeding site, Scotland, 2009. © *John Nadin*

a nest was built and occupied it appears that the breeding attempt was unsuccessful (Barden 2010, ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2011). Long suspected as a possibility, there seems every likelihood of further breeding attempts in Scotland in the near future - though none occurred at this site since the 2009 event.

There is one previous record of a Ring-billed Gull breeding with a Common Gull in Europe. This came to light when a putative adult Ring-billed Gull bearing a metal ring at Millisle, Co. Down, Northern Ireland in late March and mid-April 2008, was re-identified as a hybrid. Photographs enabled the ring number to be established (EG55164) and it transpired that it was originally ringed as a pullus in a Common Gull breeding colony on the Copeland Islands, Co. Down on 19 June 2004 (see http://birdingfrontiers.com/2011/02/15/ring-billed-gull-hybrid/). An adult Ring-billed Gull had over-summered there in 2004 (Acheson 2010, Barden 2010).

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Plate 258. Black-winged Pratincole, Loch of Skene, North-east Scotland, 3 June 2015. © *Harry Scott*

Black-winged Pratincole, Loch of Skene, 3 June 2015 - 2nd North-east Scotland record

H. ADDLESEE

Loch of Skene has been my main patch for the best part of a decade now, and when I was commuting daily between Banchory and Aberdeen I would often stop off either before or after work. Now my office has moved out to Banchory, I don't get there as often, and my attention is certainly drawn more to other spots come mid to late spring. Perhaps largely due to a busy calendar of boating activity at this time of year, not much stays on the loch to breed and it can seem lifeless, especially compared to the bustle of autumn and winter. However, I do still try to visit at least once or twice a week, and take advantage of opportunities to do so whenever they come along. After all, you never know what might drop in! My experience has shown that few good birds linger long at Skene, whatever the time of year, and so persistence is the key - just as with any patch.

Wednesday 3 June started nice and bright. One of my main tasks for the day was a site visit near Banff, for which the quickest route via Inverurie would take me close to Skene - so a no-brainer that I would stop off *en route*. However, I had a report to check through first, and it was just gone 09:30 when I set off. With a breeze from the west, as seemed to have been the case relentlessly for weeks, I contemplated whether it was worth looking from the east end at all, as it can be hopeless with the wind and resultant choppiness. I decided that I would give it a few minutes, and then shift round to the Towers at the north side where it would be more sheltered. As I walked down the short access track there were dozens of Swifts overhead, just above tree-top height, but no goodies were apparent amongst them. Still, it seemed promising, and a quick binocular scan from the water's edge showed a fair few more skimming over the loch. First up though was a proper scan of the water, as, disappointingly, I could see a safety boat out at the far end and sailing boats being readied. At least it was less windy and choppy than I'd expected.

I was literally seconds into my scan when a bird immediately grabbed my attention as it sped through my 'scope view, low over the water in the north-east corner of the loch. My instant reaction was "skua", due to the streamlined shape, strong, direct flight, and combination of dark upperparts, predominantly pale underparts, and superficially 'capped' appearance. However, as soon as I reconnected with it, it was clear that

Plate 259. Black-winged Pratincole, Loch of Skene, North-east Scotland, 3 June 2015. © *Harry Scott*

Plate 260. Black-winged Pratincole, Loch of Skene, North-east Scotland, 3 June 2015. © *Harry Scott*

it was a pratincole. Wow!!!... but which species? I've been lucky/twitchy enough to see all three species that have occurred in Britain at least once, as well as Collareds abroad, but wouldn't exactly claim great familiarity (my last Black-winged was on Anglesey in 2001). I quickly eliminated Collared, as there wasn't a trace of a white trailing edge to the wings. That left Black-winged and Oriental. My money was massively on the former, as the underwings looked dark, though not as uniform as I (wrongly) expected, and I couldn't see any hint of red, but could I be certain of the colour, given how the colouration of the upperparts, at least, was varying with the sun? I was also a little surprised at how warm the upperparts looked, and couldn't assess tail-length, as it was staying below the horizon at all times. It also didn't help that the bird was at a moderate distance and not exactly staying still! Whatever, I knew local birders would settle for any species (especially as I erroneously thought there was just the one, undetermined pratincole record for the region - not that I think too many saw the previous Black-winged!), and it was one where I really didn't want to be relying on a sketchy, single-observer description. So, after 5–10 minutes, I made the minimum number of calls/texts that I knew would get the news out effectively, and then stayed on the bird.

For the first 30 minutes or so, it kept low down, generally ranging around the north-east corner of the loch. A couple of times it looked as though it might have landed on the back of a small island, but it reappeared again after a matter of seconds. In fact, from at least 10:05, when I first saw it, to 11:45, when it disappeared out of sight to the south-east for half an hour or so, it never stopped hawking. As time went on, it gradually started going a bit higher and I could see that the tail probably looked too long for Oriental (as I remembered it), and I also became certain of the underwing colour, and hence the identification as Black-winged.

Ian Kelman was the first to arrive at about 11:00, shortly followed by several others, all of whom were also happy with the identification. I started trying to improve my notes, only to realise quite how chilly I'd got standing in the breeze for over an hour! A wander up into the warm sun on the track, and the rescuing of my gloves from the van (in the sunshine, in June!), soon sorted that. Back down for a bit more viewing, with the bird by now ranging far and wide around the loch. Phil Crockett was unlucky in timing his arrival seconds after the bird had disappeared from view, and I was relieved for him and other new arrivals when it was picked up again high over the loch, even though Phil's first view was of a dwindling speck through my scope! It did come much closer again, but I eventually decided at about 12:30 that I really must make a move. The bird was reported as present until at least 18.30, but couldn't be found the following morning, despite observers on site from 06:00.

Plate 261. Black-winged Pratincole, Loch of Skene, North-east Scotland, 3 June 2015. © *Harry Scott*

Description

Shape and size: slender-bodied and long-winged, with a short bill and a quite deeply-forked tail. Size very difficult to assess, as never seen at rest, and always difficult to judge relative distances from observer. I thought it appeared not much bigger than a Swift, but in reality it clearly must have been significantly bigger. **Upperparts:** generally quite dark. Flight feathers blackish, but paler on the mantle and coverts, and actually quite a warm brown tone in the sunshine. Indistinct small paler patch apparent on greater coverts of each wing. Rump white, extending to black tail tip - black on the inner tail feathers formed a band between the longer black outer tail feathers when the tail was spread. **Underparts:** belly and vent very pale, whitish. Indistinct sandy-ish colouration on upper breast, neck and head, and also spreading back slightly at the breast sides around the 'wingpits'. Yellowish throat-patch narrowly outlined dark. Dark lores giving masked appearance. Undertail similar to uppertail. **Underwings:** blackish, but with contrasts visible between feather tracts, *i.e.* not solid jet-black. No rufous tone and no pale margin. **Bill:** no obvious red at base, appearing all dark, but difficult to know what would have been visible (red is apparent at the bill base in photos). **Legs:** not seen/noted. **Behaviour:** fast and agile in flight, much like the Swifts it was loosely feeding with. High amongst them, it wouldn't have stood out glaringly without the pale belly.

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Plate 262. Black-winged Pratincole, Loch of Skene, North-east Scotland, 3 June 2015. © *Harry Scott*

Plate 263. Veery, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 9 June 2015. © *Molly Laban*

Veery, North Ronaldsay, May–June 2015 - 2nd Orkney record

G. WOODBRIDGE

The morning of 30 May provided some welcome relief from the persistent westerly winds and indoor study with a light westerly breeze and sunshine, after a night of torrential rain. Having finished the exams, I had keenly awaited this forecast to get the nets open for the morning mist-netting session at Holland House gardens. Though the prospects were not too promising with very little in the way of migrant songbirds on the island, but it's important to undertake regular ringing sessions given the time of year.

On approach to one of the nets in the *Fuchsia* on the first net-round, I noticed a small bird in the end of the bottom shelf. On closer inspection, it appeared to be a small thrush with a blotchy brown breast. Its size caught my attention, smaller than say a Song Thrush; but bigger than a chat such as Bluethroat with a rounder breast. This is when the blood started pumping and I became adrenalised. A glance at the underwing and my initial suspicion was confirmed by the striking underwing pattern. It was a *Catharus* thrush.

I excitedly phoned down to the observatory once all the nets were checked. I met the same dialogue from Mark Warren at the observatory and my father at home:
"I think I've caught a *Catharus* Thrush!"
"Have you checked the underwing?"
"Yes!"

I can still picture myself in that anxious five minutes before people arrived. I was in the company of a bird bag containing an American! With no experience of the genus, I tried to remember what I had read in field guides. Hermit Thrush had a rusty-brown tail though comparatively dull upperparts. This bird had an overall bright rusty-brown colour, so that ruled out one of a possible four. I remembered that Swainson's Thrush and Grey-cheeked Thrush were rather grey coloured. Though this bird was bright, and lacked an obvious eye-ring. Could this be the far rarer species, Veery?

The local 'twitchers' had arrived, myself and Mark Warren started processing the bird in the ringing room. Given his experience, I decided it would be swifter for this trans-Atlantic vagrant to have its more complex biometrics taken by him. After consultation with the guides, and a couple of biometric indications, the realisation set in that this really could be the rarest species. I pointed out that the dull ringing room light reflected a dull colour in the bird and when taken outside for photographs that became clear. Once totally sure it was in fact a Veery, I fitted the numbered metal ring accordingly.

Plate 264. Veery, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 30 May 2015. © *Gavin Woodbridge*

Plate 265. Veery, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 30 May 2015. © *George Gay*

I released the bird into the sycamores of the nearby Kirk yard, as it was a suitable habitat, and it could be viewed undisturbed by would-be viewers and leave the ringing site undisturbed. The bird initially showed frequently on the floor deep in the branches, hopping along feeding and recovering from its journey, though it later remained quite skulking and proved virtually impossible to catch up with in the gardens apart from when re-trapped. Only around a dozen people managed to witness this incredible rarity. After release, I could relax and hugs and hi-fives were exchanged. Remaining to 9 June, this smart little bird was a truly fantastic highlight of the spring. An unforgettable morning in May on North Ronaldsay.

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This was the second record of Veery for North Ronaldsay - the first was seen between 30 September and 5 October 2002.

Plate 266. Cedar Waxwing, Tiree, Argyll, 10 June 2015. © *Keith Gillon*

Cedar Waxwing, Tiree, June 2015 - the second Argyll and third Scottish record

K. GILLON

Ever since I first visited Tiree with Mark Darling in August 2004 I have tried, wherever possible, to spend at least a few days on the island in each subsequent spring and autumn. While my spring trips have been largely rarity free, the prospect of being on the island with the machir often in full flower and full of breeding waders, large numbers of Corncrakes, bays with summer-plumaged Great Northern Divers combined with the general air of relaxation, always has me itching to get back, and of course there was always the chance that one day I'd strike it lucky.

June 10th was the second full day on my spring trip this year and, as has become my norm, I began by checking a couple of the better vegetated gardens at Scarinish. By 9 o'clock I had given the garden of Glebe House a five minute check and had seen the previous day's Spotted Flycatcher but not a lot else. A patch of nearby gorse also proved to be quiet, but as I was making my way back to Glebe House I caught sight of a bird perched high in a sycamore in one corner of the garden.

Through the binoculars it was clearly a waxwing, but no sooner had I seen it than it flew, and I quickly lost it behind the Glebe House garden trees. I was well aware of the unusual date and the recent run of Nearctic passerines already reported in Britain this spring and although my views had been extremely brief, I had a strong suspicion as to its identity. I *really* needed to see it again! As the bird didn't emerge out the other side of the garden I was hopeful that it was still present.

I primed my camera and made my way slowly round the garden wall and was mightily relieved when I relocated it in an ash tree in the opposite corner from where it had flown. A quick look through the binoculars revealed that the undertail coverts were definitely white and the wing was clearly unmarked. Unbelievable! I quickly rattled off a number of shots before double checking the features again. There was no doubt; it really was a Cedar Waxwing!

The bird then moved to the top of the tree where it pecked at the buds of the newly emerged leaves (though where it was feeding on the bud cases or aphids I couldn't say). With it now in full view, I rattled off a few more pictures, but on lowering the camera I couldn't see any sign of the bird. I was unable to see it in flight anywhere so I assumed that it had dropped back into the garden and I took the opportunity to retrieve my bicycle and headed back toward my tent to get a phone signal so that I could alert John Bowler, the RSPB officer on the island.

Plate 268. Cedar Waxwing, Tiree, Argyll, 10 June 2015. *© Keith Gillon*

Plate 267. Cedar Waxwing, Tiree, Argyll, 10 June 2015. *© Keith Gillon*

I returned to the garden and John was quickly alongside, however despite our best efforts we couldn't re-find it. Multiple visits over the following days also failed to produce any further sign. Image data from my camera showed that I had watched the bird for just over a minute.

The identification was pretty straightforward. As well as the features already noted, other differences from the more familiar Bohemian Waxwing that I noted in the field were the smaller size and the yellowish wash to the lower breast. As I only ever saw the bird head on I hadn't been able to see the white inner edge to the tertials, however this feature was visible in some of my photos as the bird twisted to feed, while other pictures also showed the presence of at least five waxy tips to the secondaries.

There have been three previous British occurrences, on Noss, Shetland in June 1985, Nottingham February–March 1996 and, remarkably, a first-winter also on Tiree, at Vaul (which lies just a mile and half from Glebe House) in September 2013.

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Scottish Bird Sightings

1 April to 30 June 2015

S.L. RIVERS

Records in Scottish Bird Sightings are published for interest only. All records are subject to acceptance by the relevant records committee.

The following abbreviations for recording areas are used: Angus & Dundee - A&D; Argyll - Arg; Ayrshire - Ayrs; Borders - Bord; Caithness - Caith; Dumfries & Galloway D&G; Highland - High; Lothian - Loth; Moray & Nairn - M&N; North-East Scotland - NES; Outer Hebrides - OH; Perth & Kinross - P&K; Shetland - Shet; Upper Forth - UF.

April brought some warm days and sunshine, while prolonged westerlies in May and June paid dividends with a number of Nearctic surprises. There was a decent flurry of scarcities on the Northern Isles in late May/early June, but elsewhere it was a generally disappointing spring for numbers of passerine migrants and a lack of the usual scarce ones.

Bewick's Swan: one was near Newburgh (Fife) on 4–9 April. **Tundra Bean Goose:** one remained on North Ronaldsay (Ork) to 18 April; one was at Burravoe, Yell (Shet) on 2–16th and 27 April, and one at Dowlaw (Bord) on 4 April. **Todd's Canada Goose** [*interior*] one showing characteristics of this form was at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) from 27–30 May, with one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 31 May. **Lesser Canada Goose** [*parvipes*]: one showing characteristics of this form was at Haroldswick, Unst (Shet) on 26–27 May, and one at Loch Stiapabhat, Lewis (OH) on 22–28 June.

American Wigeon: the pair at Papil Loch, Burra (Shet) stayed to 12 April, with a drake still to 16th;

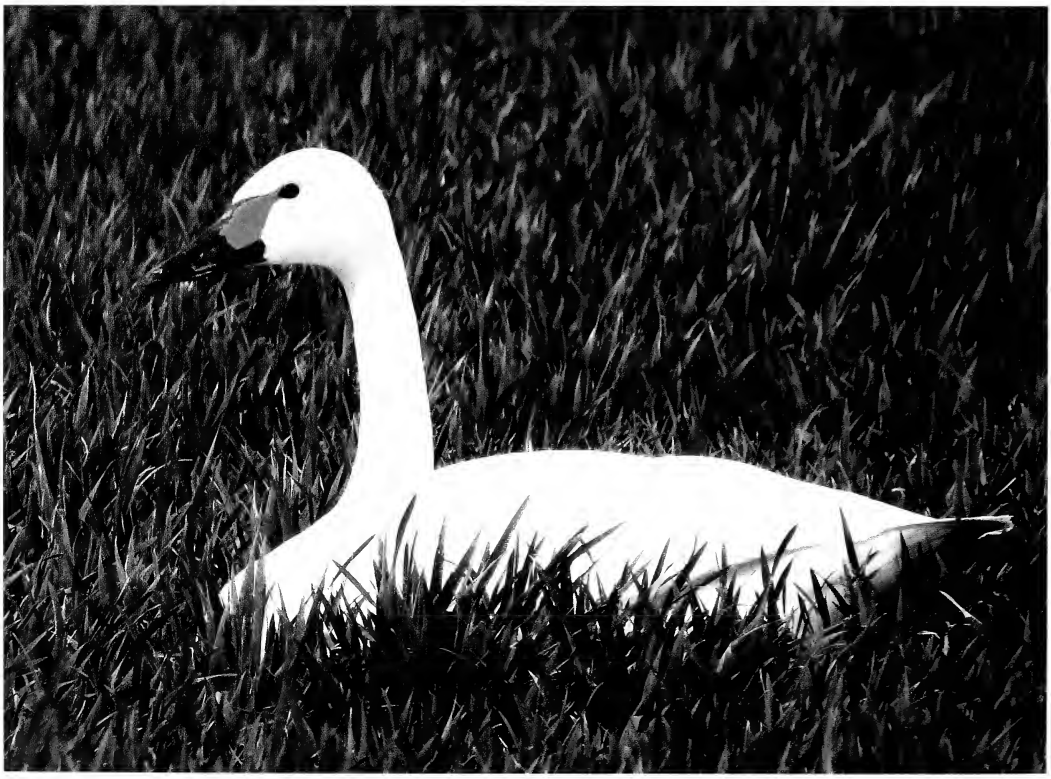

Plate 269. Bewick's Swan, Newburgh, Fife, April 2015. © *John Nadin*

a drake was on Loch of Harray, Mainland (Ork) from 7–11 April, then at The Loons RSPB Reserve, Birsay, Mainland (Ork) on 19–26 April; a drake at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 28 May to 7 June; a female was at Rigifa Pool, Cove (NES) from 7–29 June and a drake was on Loch Bee, South Uist (OH) on 19 June. **Green-winged Teal:** all refer to drakes - one remained at Loch nam Feithean then Loch Sandary, North Uist (OH) to 13 April; one was at Loch of Spiggie, Mainland (Shet) on 12–19 April; at Loch an Eilein, Tiree (Arg) on 13th; one at Loch a' Roe, North Uist (OH) on 16–20th; one at Loch of Tankerness, Mainland (Ork) again on 19 April; one at Loch Stiapabhat, Lewis (OH) on 2 May; one at Loch Sandary again on 10 May; one at Lochwinnoch RSPB Reserve (Clyde) on 14 May; one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 23 May; one at Loch Bornish, South Uist at the end of May; one was at Loch of Hillwell, Mainland (Shet) on 24 June and one at Loch Portain, North Uist on 27 June. **Black Duck:** the presumed returning adult drake was at Strontian (High) on 19 April (last there in March 2013). **Garganey:** noted in small numbers from 6 April to 22 June, including several pairs, and recorded from Lothian and Ayrshire to the Outer Hebrides and Shetland. **Blue-winged Teal:** an adult drake reappeared at The Shunan, nr Loch Harray, Mainland (Ork) on 12 April. **Ring-necked Duck:** a drake remained at Loch Scarie, North Uist (OH) to 3 April; one was at Policy Loch/Loch of Skene again on 8–9 April; two drakes were at Levenwick, Mainland (Shet) on 17 May and Loch of Hillwell, Mainland on 19 May to 1 June; one was at Loch of Skaill, Mainland (Ork) on 4–9 June and nearby at Loch of Clumly (Ork) on 7th and 24–26 June. **Lesser Scaup:** a first-winter drake remained at Martnaham Loch (Ayrs) to 30 April; a female was at Loch Ardvule, South Uist (OH) on 12–17 April.

King Eider: the female lingered off Ruddons Point, (Fife) until 7 April; one or possibly two drakes were at Burghead and Spey Bay (both M&N) on 4 April; a drake was at the Ythan Estuary (NES) from 5 April to 23 June, with the same at St Combs (NES) on 14 April; a female was off Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 7–24 June; a drake was seen at Kingston, Spey Bay (M&N) on 20 June, and one at Wester Delnies, near Nairn (M&N) on 27–28 June. **Surf Scoter:** the drake lingered between Joppa and Musselburgh (Loth) to 6 May; two drakes were in Deer Sound, near Deerness, Mainland (Ork) on 2 April and off Rerwick Head, Mainland on 17 April; a drake was off Ruddons Point (Fife) on 18–21 April at least; one flew past Wats Ness, Mainland (Shet) and an adult drake was on Loch na Keal, Mull (Arg) on 13 May; a female was off Murcar/Blackdog (NES) on 31 May to 4 June. **Harlequin Duck:** the first-winter drake on the River Don, Aberdeen (NES) lingered to 21 May - a new British record stay of 139 days, and the female at Brora (High) remained to 30 April (73days).

White-billed Diver: one remained off South Ronaldsay (Ork) to 9 May, up to three were offshore near Portsoy (NES) from 1–7 April, and two still the following week, one nearby at Cullen (M&N) on 27 April and 8 May, three off Portsoy still on 1 May, and singles there on 7th and 10 May and nearby at Sandend (NES) on 12 May. Higher counts were noted from boat-trips off Portsoy with 10+ on 4 April, 12 on 6th, 10 on 18th, eight on 22nd and five on 27 April, and seven on 9 May. Elsewhere there was one near Port Nis/Skigersta, Lewis (OH) on 5–9 April, with three there on 16 April; one off Lossiemouth (M&N) on 9 April; one in Gruinard Bay (High) on 15th; one was off Thorntonloch (Loth) on 18–21 April; a summer-plumaged adult flew past Esha Ness, Mainland (Shet) on 1 May; a first-summer was in Quendale Bay, Mainland (Shet) on 2 May; one was off Balnakeil (High) on 21 May; one passed Rubh' Arnal, North Uist (OH) on 22 May. One lingered at Esha Ness (Shet) on 5–17 June; one was seen from a boat off Troon (Ayrs) on 9 June.

Little Egret: much under-reported, but ones and twos noted from Lothian and Dumfries & Galloway north, with one on Shetland on 17–20 May the most northerly sighting. **Great White Egret:** one was at Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve, Islay (Arg) on 17 April; one was at Loch Bee, South Uist (OH) on 18–20 April, then at Griminish, North Uist on 21st and at Loch Fada, Benbecula (OH) 23–26 April; one was at Loch of Wester (High) on 27 April. One flew over the Isle of May (first island record) and then Crail (Fife) on 3 May, with it presumably the bird at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) from 4 May to 7 June; one was at Balvicar, Seil Island (Arg) on 4 May; one at Brawlbin (Caith) on 20–27 May; one on Fair Isle on 31 May was the first record for the island; one was at Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve, Islay (Arg) on 24 June and one at Threave (D&G) on 25 June. **Purple Heron:** one was at Ruthwell (D&G) on 23 June. **Spoonbill:** two were at Findhorn Bay (M&N) from 17 June.

Honey-buzzard: a male flew north over Rigg Bay (D&G) on 6 May, one over Sumburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 19 May and one just east of Holyrood Park, Edinburgh (Loth) on 20 May. **Black Kite:** one on south Mainland (Shet) at Sumburgh and Exnaboe on 26 April and then Tingwall on 27 April. **Montagu's**

Harrier: one was at Burgar Hill, Evie, Mainland (Ork) on 15 May. **Rough-legged Buzzard:** the immature at Lochindorb (High) remained to 1 May; one near Lybster (Caith) on 6 April; one was at Langholm (D&G) on 9 April; one near Fettercairn (NES) on 16 April and at Rattray Head (NES) on 19–20 April; one was at Belmont, Unst (Shet) on 29 April and then at Norwick, Unst on 30th. One flew over North Ronaldsay (Ork) and then Fair Isle on 8 May, with one at Cabrach (M&N) on 9 May. **Hobby:** reports included one over Haligarth, Unst (Shet) on 28 May; one was at Skaw, Whalsay (Shet) the same day; one on Fair Isle on 30th; a first-summer at Marwick, Mainland (Ork) on 31 May; singles on Fair Isle and North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 5 June; at Nethybridge (High) on 6 June; at Muness, Unst on 7th; at Kindrogan (P&K) on 9th; at Kilrenny (Fife) on 13th; at Hilwell, Mainland (Shet) on 20th; one Fair Isle on 21st; at Sumburgh and Scatness, Mainland (Shet) on 27–29th; at Letham Pools, near Collessie (Fife) on 28–30th and at Symbister, Whalsay on 30 June. **American Coot:** one remained at Loch nam Feithean/Balranald, North Uist (OH) to 3 April. **Crane:** two were at Port Glasgow (Clyde) on 22 April; two at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 25 April; one at Ardivachar Point, South Uist (OH) on 27–29 April; one at Inver, near Portmahomack (High) on 30 April; one near Shotts (Clyde) on 9 May; two at Water of Raga, Yell (Shet) on 10 May, then at Cunningsburgh and Levenwick, both Mainland (Shet) on 11th, and presumably then on Fair Isle on 14–15 May, and one was at Crimond (NES) on 15 June.

Avocet: two were near Lossiemouth on 16th and 18 April. **Black-winged Pratincole:** one was at Loch of Skene (NES) on 3 June. **Kentish Plover:** a male was at Dornoch Point (High) on 7–10 May; a female was at Balcomie Beach, Fife Ness (Fife) on 30–31 May. **Temminck's Stint:** one was at Vane Farm RSPB Reserve (P&K) from 23 June. **Pectoral Sandpiper:** one was Loch Stiapabhat, Lewis (OH) on 28 May to 7 June; one was at Whitemill Bay, Sanday (Ork) on 4 June. **White-rumped Sandpiper:** one was on Papa Westray (Ork) on 25–28 April, then at North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 1–3 May. **Broad-billed Sandpiper:** one was at Findhorn Bay (M&N) on 29 May. **Spotted Sandpiper:** one was at Cauchlands, Lamlash Bay, Arran (Clyde Islands) on 19–21 May. **Red-necked Phalarope:** away from potential breeding areas, two were near Campbeltown, Kintyre (Arg) on 26 May; two at Musselburgh Lagoons (Loth) on 31 May; one at Elliot Burn, Arbroath (A&D) on 3 June; one at Butt of Lewis, Lewis (OH) on 6 June; one at Drongan (Ayrs) on 8 June; one at Tarland (NES) on 20 June, and one at Rigifa Pool, Cove (NES) on 24–25 June. **Grey Phalarope:** three were seen from the Uig to Lochmaddy ferry (High/OH) on 8 May; a female was noted on the sea between Tayinloan and Gigha (Arg) on 21 May.

Plate 270. Kentish Plover, Dornoch, Highland, May 2015. © *David Main*

Pomarine Skua: an exceptional passage started with 12 off Saltcoats (Ayrs) and five off Aird an Runair, North Uist (OH) on 4 May, with three off Newbie (D&G) and six past Seafield (D&G) on 5 May before at least 40 birds noted in the SW on 6th. Numbers increased from then with counts of 86 at Saltcoats (Ayrs), 71 off Aird an Runair/Balranald and 85 off Mangersta, Lewis (OH) on 7th. Thereafter highest counts were mostly from North Uist with 105 off Aird an Runair on 11 May, 353 on 12th, 532 on 15th, 911 on 16th, 202 on 20th and 429 on 24 May. Away from the west coast higher counts were 465 past Esha Ness, Mainland (Shet) on 13 May; 21 off Wats Ness, Mainland (Shet) the same day; 13 off Fair Isle on 13 May. 97 off Sanday (Ork) on 13 May and one off Skateraw (Loth) on 16 May - the only east coast sighting. Last reported were two past Aird an Runair on 18 June. **Long-tailed Skua:** first were two off Aird an Runair/Balranald, North Uist (OH), one past North Ronaldsay (Ork) and 36 past Esha Ness, Mainland (Shet) on 7 May. An exceptional passage occurred in May - the main pulse started on 11 May with 20 off Newbie (D&G) and 762 past Aird an Runair. The latter site then produced the highest daily counts with 1,307 on 12 May, with 437 on 15th, 847 on 16th, 236 on 17th; 317 on 24th and 325 on 28th and 203 on 31 May. Elsewhere higher counts were 645 past Esha Ness on 13 May, with 40 past Fair Isle and over 180 in Orkney waters the same day; up to 40 in Ayrshire on 17th; 10 over Bridge of Waithe, near Stromness (Ork) on 19th; four off Mull (Arg) on 20th; 29 off Saltcoats on 22nd; 11 on the Ayrshire coast on 28 May, five past Rhum/Eigg (High) on 28th one on 29th and one on 2 June. East coast sightings were one near Fort George (High) on 13 May; one in Dalgety Bay (Fife) on 14 May. Last were two past Aird an Runair on 18 June.

Sabine's Gull: an adult was at Salum, Tiree (Arg) on 23 May, probably the same at Gott Bay, Tiree on 27th and again at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 2 June. **Bonaparte's Gull:** the adult was again at Ormsary, Loch Caolisport (Arg) on 6 April; an adult was at Skaw, Unst (Shet) on 11 June; a first-summer was on St. Kilda (OH) on 12–21 June.

Mediterranean Gull: notably few reports from the Firth of Forth, with most noted on the west coast - including two at Barassie (Ayrs) on 1 April; a first-winter at Machrihanish, Kintyre (Arg) on 1 April; a first-summer was on Sanday (Ork) on 12 May and a first-summer at Loch Branahuie, Lewis (OH) on 27–28 May.

Ring-billed Gull: the adult at Dingwall (High) was still present to 4 April; the first-winter was at Balranald, North Uist (OH) to 10 April, with presumed same nearby at Tigharry to 16th; a first-winter was seen at Barassie (Ayrs) on 1 April; an adult was at Loch of Hillwell, Mainland (Shet) on 13–14 April; an adult was at Stinky Bay, Benbecula (OH) on 30 May and a second-summer at Carnan, South Uist (OH) on 20 June. **Yellow-legged Gull:** an adult remained at Shewalton Sand Pit (Ayrs) to 4 April. **American Herring Gull:** a first-summer was on St Kilda (OH) on 12 June, when eaten by a Great Skua.

Iceland Gull: well over 60 birds lingered to April, including 11 on Shetland, seven on Orkney, up to 29 on Outer Hebrides including a peak count of 19 (17 juvs) at Stornoway, Lewis on 10 April, six in Highland and at least 10 in Argyll. Around 30 remained into May including up to 19 on the Outer Hebrides, with a peak count of six at Stornoway on 1st. Several were still present throughout June, mostly singles on the Northern Isles and Inner and Outer Hebrides. **Kumlien's Gull:** the juvenile remained at Ormsary, Loch Caolisport (Arg) to 6 April; a third-winter was (mostly) at Smerclate South Uist (OH) on 5–10 April; an adult was at Loch of Hillwell, Mainland (Shet) on 16 April; a first-winter at Rubh' Arnal, North Uist (OH) on 17 April; on was at Rubha Ardvule, South Uist on 23 April, one at Loch Stiapabhat, Lewis (OH) on 4–8 May. **Glaucous Gull:** up to 22 were reported in April, including at least nine on the Outer Hebrides - peak count of four at Rubh' Arnal, North Uist on 17th, and five on Orkney. About 18 lingered into May, with up to nine still on the Outer Hebrides and five on Orkney. A few remained throughout June, with most on Orkney, Shetland and the Outer Hebrides. **Gull-billed Tern:** one was at Birsay, Mainland (Ork) on 20–22 June. **Black Tern:** two were off Tiumpan head, Lewis (OH) on 9 May; one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 24th and 27–30 June, and one off Wester Sand, Mainland (Ork) on 27 June. **Little Auk:** a late bird was off Hillswick Ness, Mainland (Shet) on 20 April.

Turtle Dove: once again relatively few reported - singles were on Fair Isle on 7–13 May, with two on 9th; at Back of Keppoch, Arisaig (High) on 17 May to 1 June; on Fair Isle on 22–28 May; at Wick (Caith) on 22nd; on Out Skerries (Shet) on 25th; at Garrabost, Lewis (OH) on 26–30th; on Papa Westray and at Deerness, Mainland (both Ork) on 29th; at Arisaig (High) on 1 June; at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 8 June; at Rattray Head (NES) on 17th and one at Levenwick, Mainland (Shet) on 25 June. **Scops Owl:** one was found, freshly dead, on Hirta, St Kilda

Plate 271. Bee-eater, Sanday, Orkney, May 2015. © *Matthew McArthur*

(OH) on 1st May. **Alpine Swift:** one was at Garnock Floods SWT Reserve (Ayrs) on 24 June. **Bee-eater:** one was at Ousdale (High) on 22 May: one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) 23rd, 26 and 29 May and also on Sanday (Ork) on 25 May and Quoyloo, Mainland (Ork) on 30 May; two were on Canna (High) and one at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 10 June; one was at Castlebay, Barra (OH) on 17 June, increasing to three on 18–19th and up to five were at Nasg/Castlebay on 20th and Brevig, Barra on 21st; three were at Port Charlotte, Islay (Arg) on 23rd; one flew over Stenton (Loth) on 23 June; one was at Cleadale, Eigg (High) on 24th and one at Gullane (Loth) on 25 June. **Hoopoe:** one was at Ormiclate, South Uist (OH) on 11–12 April; one at Glencruittein, near Oban (Arg) on 12th; one at Laggan Dam (High) on 12 April; one at Loch Gair (Arg) on 14th; one at Ardchattan (Arg) on 21 April; one near Tomintoul (NES) on 9 May; one was at St Abbs (Bord) on 14 May; one at Clibberswick, Unst (Shet) on 18–21 May. **Wryneck:** one was at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 26 April; singles on Fair Isle on 3rd, 5–6th and 10–11 May; one on the Isle of May on 4 May; one at Barns Ness (Loth) on 9–12 May; one was at Malaclete, North Uist (OH) on 13 May and one on Out Skerries (Shet) on 25 May (found dead on 1 June).

Golden Oriole: a male was at Tankerness, Mainland (Ork) on 7 May; a female/1st-summer male was on Fair Isle on 17 May; singles at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 21st and 30 May to 2 June; a singing male near Forres (M&N) on 2–4 June; a female/1st-summer male at Griminish, Benbecula (OH) on 6th; a female at Langass Lodge, North Uist (OH) on 8th; a female at Halligarth, Unst on 8–15th; one at Claggan, near Strontian (High) on 14 June and a female/1st-summer male on Fair Isle on 22–29 June. **Red-backed Shrike:** an early male was seen at Portnalong, Isle of Skye (High) on 7 May; all others were on the Northern Isles - a female near Kirkwall, Mainland (Ork) on 28 May; a male on Fair Isle on 1–3 June and at least two more birds from 4–9th; two on Shetland on 2 June; up to seven were on Shetland and up to five were on Orkney on 3–9 June; another male was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 11th; singles were on Fair Isle on 13th and 15th; one at Norwick, Unst (Shet) on 14th; one at Tresta, Fetlar (Shet) on 15th; a female on Fair Isle on 19th; a female on Burray (Ork) on 21–22nd, a male on North Ronaldsay on 22nd; a female on Fair Isle on 27th and one at Pool of Virkie, Mainland (Shet) on 29 June. **Woodchat Shrike:** one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 19 May. **Magpie:** one at Butt of Lewis, Lewis on 1–10 May was the first record for the Outer Hebrides. **Great Tit:** one on St Kilda (OH) on 19 April was particularly noteworthy. **Short-toed Lark:** singles were on Fair Isle on 8–11 May, with two on 16–17th and one to 22th. **Red-rumped Swallow:** one was at Marwick Bay, Mainland (Ork) on 8 June.

Greenish Warbler: one was on Out Skerries (Shet) and one at Skaw, Unst (Shet) on 2 June; one on Sanday (Ork) on 3rd; two were on Fair Isle on 3–5th; singles at Swining, Mainland and on Foula (all Shet) on 5th; one at Sandwick, Mainland (Shet) on 5–6th; one on Out Skerries (Shet) on 6th and one at Skaw, Unst (Shet) on 8th. **Subalpine Warbler:** a first-summer female was at Rubha Ardvule, South Uist (OH) on 14 May; a female 'Western' was at Halligarth, Unst, on 25–28 May; a male [probable] Western was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 20–21 June and a first-summer male Western was on Fair Isle on 30 June [into July]. **Moltoni's Warbler:** a male was on Fair Isle on 15–26 May; a male showing characteristics of this species was at Balranald RSPB Reserve, North Uist (OH) on 4 June. **Icterine Warbler:** nine were on Shetland, two on Fair Isle and one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 2 June; one still on Fair Isle on 3–6th, with two on 4–5th; up to 14 on Shetland between 3–8 June; one on Sanday (Ork) on 4–5 June; one on North Ronaldsay on 6–7 June; one at Melvich (High) on 5 June; one was singing at Crathie, near Ballater (NES) on 8–11th; one was singing at Kingussie (High) on 11–24th; one was on Fair Isle on 14 June; one on Fetlar (Shet) on 14th and at Houbie, Fetlar on 15th and 18th, with two on 16th; two were on North Ronaldsay on 19–20th; one was at Tongue (High) on 29–30 June. **Marsh Warbler:** singles were on Fair Isle on 1st and 3–5 June, with two on 6th; one at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 2 June; one at Burrafirth, Unst on 3rd; singles at Skaw, Unst and Mossbank, Mainland (both Shet) on 6–8 June; one at Norwick, Unst on 8th; one at Sumburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 9 June; one on Fair Isle on 13th; one at Quendale, Mainland (Shet) on 14th; one at Funzie, Fetlar (Shet) on 16th; one at Baltasound, Unst on 20th; two were on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 20 June, with one still to 27th; singles on Fair Isle on 22nd, 25th and 30th; one at Tongue (High) on 25–26 June and one at Evie (Ork) on 30 June. **Blyth's Reed Warbler:** one was on Fair Isle on 8 June; a singing male was at Port Elphinstone, Inverurie (NES) on 18–27 June. **Great Reed Warbler:** one was at Baltasound/Halligarth, Unst (Shet) on 3–22 June.

Cedar Waxwing: one was at Scarinish, Tiree (Arg) on 10 June. **Waxwing:** very few were reported, but included a flock of 12 flew over Humbie (Loth) on 18 April, and singles were at Lerwick, Mainland (Shet) on 30 April and Brae, Mainland (Shet) on 2 May. **Nuthatch:** one at Carrbridge (High) on 24 April was notably far north. **Rose-coloured Starling:** one was at Ardivachar Point, South Uist (OH) on 19–21 May; an adult was at Fowlsheugh RSPB Reserve (NES) on 16 June; an adult was at Tiumpan Head, Lewis (OH) on at least 18–21 June; one was at Scaladale, Harris (OH) on 21st, with it, or another, at Miabhaig, Harris on 24–28th, and one was on Hoy (Ork) on 24 June. **Swainson's Thrush:** one was at Houbie, Fetlar (Shet) on 16 June. **Veery:** one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) from 30 May to 9 June. **Eyebrowed Thrush:** a female was at Symbister, Whalsay (Shet) on 20 June. **Nightingale:** one was on Noss (Shet) from 9–31 May; one was on the Isle of May on 13 June and one on Fair Isle on 30 June. **Bluethroat:** one was on Fair Isle on 15–17 May; one on Out Skerries (Shet) on 23 May; one at Hermaness, Unst (Shet) on 25 May; a female on Fair Isle on 29 May; a female on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 31 May; a male was on Noss (Shet) on 31 May to 1 June; two on Out Skerries, one at Haroldswick, Unst and a male at Isbister, Whalsay (all Shet) on 2 June; singles on Foula (Shet) and Fair Isle on 3 June; singles on North Ronaldsay on 3rd and 5 June; one at Gerraquoy,

Plate 272. Bluethroat, South Ronaldsay, Orkney, June 2015. © *David Edgar*

Plate 273. Blue-headed Wagtail, Maidens, Ayrshire, April 2015. © *Angus Hogg*

Plate 274. 'Channel Wagtail' (hybrid *M. f. flava* x *M. f. flavissima*), Torness, Lothian, April 2015. © *Ian Andrews*

South Ronaldsay (Ork) on 4th and one at Boddam, Mainland (Shet) on 6 June. **Grey-headed Wagtail:** singles were on Fair Isle on 9–11th, 21st and 23–25 May and 5 June; one at Haroldswick, Unst (Shet) on 7 June. **Blue-headed Wagtail:** one was at Maidens (Ayrs) on 11 April; singles were at Gairlochy (High) and Seafield Pond, Dunbar (Loth) on 3 May; on North Ronaldsay on 8th and 12 May; on Fair Isle on 15–19th and 25 May. **'Channel Wagtail'** one was at Torness (Loth) on 19–23 April. **Tawny Pipit:** one was on Fair Isle on 4–6 May and another on 17–19 May. **Olive-backed Pipit:** one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 5 June.

Common Rosefinch: an immature male was on Fair Isle on 1–2 June; two on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 1 June, with one still on 2nd; a female/imm male was at Westshore, Burray (Ork) on 2 June; one at Loch of Spiggie and two at Pool of Virkie, both Mainland (Shet) on 3rd; two on Foula (Shet) and one on the Isle of May on 5th; singles at Hamister, Whalsay (Shet) and at Latheronwheel (Caith) on 8 June; one on Fair Isle on 11th; one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 12th; and one at Melvich (High) on 12–14th; singles at Lochgilphead (Arg) and on the Isle of May on 13th; one at Norwick, Unst (Shet) on 14th; one on Fair Isle on 18 June and one at Brora (High) on 24–28 June. **Snow Bunting:** relatively low numbers, including 23 on North Ronaldsay (Ork) and two at Lossie Estuary (M&N) on 1 April; two at Skateraw (Loth) on 3–8th; four at Sumburgh, Mainland (Shet), one at Butt of Lewis, Lewis (OH) and 18 at Dornoch (High) on 4 April; one on North Ronaldsay on 9th; one at Golspie (High) on 14th; two at Ardivachar, South Uist (OH) on 20th; one at Butt of Lewis on 23–24th; 20 were at Cairngorm (High) on 25 April; one at Cullivoe, Yell (Shet) on 26th; one on Fair Isle on 2 May, with two there on 6 May; two on Noss (Shet) on 7th; one at Mangersta, Lewis on 7th; three on North Ronaldsay on 9th; one at Westing, Unst (Shet) on 18th; one on Fair Isle on 26th; two on North Ronaldsay on 28th and one at Esha Ness, Mainland (Shet) on 29 May. **Lapland Bunting:** one flew over Burghead (M&N) on 5 April; one was at Scatness, Mainland (Shet) on 25 April; one on Fair Isle on 26–27th and a female there on 30 April; one Crossapol Point, Tiree (Arg) on 1 May; a female at Marwick Head, Mainland (Ork) on 8 May; a male at Loch Stiapabhat, Lewis (OH) on 8–11th; one at Ardivachar Point, South Uist (OH) on 10th; a female at Birsay Bay, Mainland (Ork) on 31 May and a male on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 1–2 June. **Dark-eyed Junco:** an adult male was at Toab, Mainland (Shet) on 11 May. **Ortolan Bunting:** one was at Morar (High) on 23–26 June. **Rustic Bunting:** a female/immature male was on Fair Isle on 19 May, a singing male on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 20–30 May, a male at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 27–29 May and one at Sumburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 21 June.

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PhotoSPOT

[illegible] for Dotterel. The hill seems much [illegible] than 10 years ago! I was accompanied by Alan Knox on 25 May 2015 and it was not long before we came across a small trip of eight birds in the biting wind. As usual, they allowed quite close approach and as we watched them feeding and displaying they were joined by a Dunlin.

[illegible] the Dunlin [illegible] seemed very settled so I was able to approach it cautiously to within a few metres by slithering over the short, mercifully dry, vegetation. It posed beautifully on a small mound calling occasionally. The light was piercingly bright, so I took many frames in order to be sure of one with the catchlight in the eye. The result is all I could have wished for, this delightful little wader in full summer plumage on its breeding ground.

Nick Picozzi, Banchory, Aberdeenshire.
Email: loy@dee.u-net.com

Equipment used: Nikon D7000 with Nikon ED [illegible] lens, ISO 400, Shutter Priority 1/1250th, aperture f10.

Featuring the best images posted on the SOC website each quarter, PhotoSpot will present stunning portraits as well as record shots of something interesting, accompanied by the story behind the photograph and the equipment used. Upload your photos now - it's open to all.